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THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE IN FICTION: THE FIRST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

Jesse C. Gatlin, Jr.

Air Force Academy
Colorado

April 1973

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by

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Department of English

This Research Report is presented as a competent treatment of the subject, worthy of publication. The United States Air Force Academy vouches for the quality of the research, without necessarily endorsing the opinions and conclusions of the authors.

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ABSTRACT

This report is a critical and analytical survey of all the book-length fiction written about the United States Air Force from its establishment in 1947 to 1972. The novels are grouped chiefly by historical period, then summarized, evaluated, and compared.

PREFACE

It has been necessary in this essay to summarize several novels at length, for many of them are now out of print and thus may be difficult for the interested reader to procure. The author discovered that many relatively large public and college libraries do not contain copies of some of the works judged to be most worthy. The summaries are an attempt to provide sufficient information on characters and incidents to make analysis and evaluations of the works meaningful to the reader.

All references to quoted passages are made to the numbered alphabetized bibliography which appears at the end of this work. For example, the entry "(3:64-65)" after a quotation refers to pages 64 and 65 of item number 3 of the bibliography. Repeated references to a single volume are documented in parentheses only by page numbers, e.g., "(72-73)."

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Wolfe once wrote that "Fiction is not fact. But fiction is fact selected and understood, fiction is fact arranged and charged with purpose." To the extent that a writer of fiction creates in his work a world and a selection of characters that are not pure fantasy, he chooses certain arrangements of the "facts" of human experience and arranges them to achieve some purpose, some thematic goal which he sets for himself in his writing. The image of experience which results from his achieved work of literature, especially if that image is vividly and artistically evoked, is capable of reordering the attitudes and emotions of those who come to know that work. It has been long contended by men of learning and wisdom--including the Greek philosopher Aristotle and the Renaissance soldier-scholar Sir Philip Sidney--that fiction is more powerful than either history or philosophy in shaping men's attitudes, because fiction is not necessarily constrained by the sequential facts of history nor bound by the limitations of any abstract philosophical system or principle. It is not surprising to realize how crucially important the images of literature have been in creating for us our views of people and worlds we have never fully experienced ourselves. It is, after all, largely through the art it bequeaths us that an age, a culture, an institution, or a people are best known. Our knowledge of the Greeks, for example, is epitomized in a kaleidoscopic cluster of images--mostly of people: the great Achilles sulking on the

beach at Troy; a noble and valiant Hector bidding farewell to his wife and son to go forth to certain death in defense of his city; a blind Oedipus groping his sightless way toward light; a proud Creon and a stubborn Antigone putting their concepts of honor and duty in a tragic struggle; a tormented Orestes fleeing in desperate horror the demands of justice and obligation. And Rome exists for us as vividly in Shakespeare's impetuous Antony, or the noble, logical Brutus, or the haughty Caesar, or the calculating Octavius as in any of the accounts of its historians. Dante's panderers and popes, Conrad's seamen, Dickens's lawyers, Flaubert's French provincials, Hawthorne's Puritans, Sinclair Lewis's businessmen, Faulkner's country Southerners--all these we know in terms of their author's images of their reality. Our attitudes, and often our actions, concerning these people depend in great measure on those images of them which have been impressed upon us by the fiction we have read about them. Such fiction, unlike many of the historical studies or sociological tracts or philosophical essays, deals with what finally matters most to each of us: with man's struggles with himself, his fellows, his institutions, in the complex welter of experience which makes up the reality of day-to-day human existence. In fiction we share vicariously in these struggles; we share intellectually and emotionally the tragedy, the pathos, the hypocrisy, the emptiness, the cruelty as well as the happiness, the fulfillment, the beauty revealed to us by these artifacts of literature. They involve us because in reading them they become a part of our own experience. It follows that when works of fiction are read and experienced by large numbers of people, their influence can affect the attitudes and actions of the reading public in important and enduring ways.

This essay will survey a group of book-length works, all but one of them novels, which are set within the United States Air Force or which portray significant characters who are Air Force members. The group includes every novel the author was able to find which deals in any important way with either the Air Force or its individual members. Many of the novels are of very limited value as literature; some are creditable, workmanlike books which have received little critical or popular attention; a few have achieved high positions on national best-seller lists and have been also produced as commercially successful motion pictures. Except for a few novels of the World War II Army Air Corps era, included chiefly as comparative material to aid in evaluating the later novels, all the works deal with the U.S. Air Force and are therefore both written and set in the period from the official birth of the Air Force in 1947 to the present. Dealing as they do with a relatively young national institution and with events portrayed as occurring in so short and recent a time-span, the novels as a group tend toward a topicality of interest which often limits their potential as enduring works of literature. Even the best of them fail to achieve both the temporal and the aesthetic distance between author and subject which usually distinguishes works that endure beyond their own time and place. But if there are no masterpieces, no potential classics in this group, there are at least a few previously unearthed nuggets in all the ore which may justify the labor of digging. And there is in the first twenty-five years of the Air Force's existence a surprisingly large body of fiction in which it plays an important role. Though it would be impossible to measure with any precision the effect this body of fiction has had in shaping our nation's view of its youngest armed service, it is certain that taken together

these novels have contributed significantly to whatever dispositions, favorable or unfavorable, the American people hold toward their Air Force.

Chapter II

WORLD WAR II AND ITS AFTERMATH

Between the end of World War II and the Korean conflict the U. S. Air Force was christened. It had been born years earlier as a child of the Army, and its fictional face had already been given shape in such novels of the Air Corps as John Hersey's The War Lover, William Wister Haines's Command Decision, and James Gould Cozzens's Guard of Honor. Together with Joseph Heller's bitterly comic masterpiece, Catch-22, these three set fictional standards in their treatment of both operational and social aspects of Air Corps life which have not been surpassed by any of the later works about the Air Force.

In The War Lover, Hersey tells his story from the point of view of Charles Boman, co-pilot of a heavy bomber crew commanded by the aggressive Buzz Marrow whose character and exploits give the novel its title. Fundamentally psychological in its thrust, the story explores, through Boman's telling, the reactions of a perceptive and sensitive young man to the boisterous, blustering, sometimes comic, often cruel aggressiveness of his commander and pilot, reaching a climax in Marrow's brutal but finally impotent attempt to seduce Boman's English girl friend Daphne. The story culminates in a final bombing mission during which Marrow reveals his self-doubts, relinquishes control of the plane and crew to Boman, and suicidally refuses rescue after the plane is ditched off the English coast. The relationship between Boman and Marrow (perhaps Hersey intends a pun on "Bone and Marrow") is one of both attraction and

repulsion, mutual need and mutual jealousy. They complement each other, even as they conflict. The novels suffers from the almost too angelic English girl, Daphne, who becomes the catalyst for both Marrow's breakdown and Boman's self-knowledge and understanding of Marrow's aggressive personality. It reduces war to its individual human source in man's predatory impulses, and, while not optimistic about the prospect for improvement in basic human nature, it suggests that selfless love and the courage such love requires can ameliorate the forces of hate and self-loathing which are root causes of conflict between men and nations. The War Lover is intensely personal in its treatment of war; problems of command, of strategy, of national or even small organizational concern are hardly mentioned. But what these omissions lose in magnitude the narrow personal focus gains in intensit for this fine novel.

In contrast to The War Lover, William Wister Haines's Command Decision, as its title suggests, concentrates on the complex, often contradictory forces which concentrate on a unit commander faced with the need to reconcile his personal and social imperatives with the demands of effective combat operations. Again, a bomber unit becomes the world of the story, which Haines tells from an omniscient point of view that allows him to shift his focus from a panoramic overview of the air war and the bomber group's mission in it to a much more restricted view of events as seen at different times through the commanding officer of the group, a civilian war reporter, a skeptical administrative sergeant, and several others. This technique of writing is itself indicative of the broadened scope of the novel as compared to The War Lover with its restricted first person narrator. Command Decision brings together not

only the generals and the colonels who are responsible for decision-making but also the combat crews and the support people who must advise, attempt to influence, agonize over, and finally abide and endeavor to execute the decisions made by the commanders. The novel evokes with precision and economy the oppressive moral dilemmas of men at war. It respects the viewpoints of both commander and commanded, which is to say that it respects the world of military service and the genuine human problems men of integrity so often must face within that world. At the end of the book, Brig. Gen. Casey Dennis, the bomber group commander and the novel's protagonist, emerges as a humane, often harassed, but thoroughly sympathetic man of high moral stature.

Another even finer novel of the Army Air Corps is James Gould Cozzens's Guard of Honor, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1949. Cozzens is an underrated novelist, chiefly because of what one critic, Harry Mooney, Jr., has called his "unique, unfashionable view of man, a view so thoroughly rational that it frequently assaults our traditional religious and political attitudes" (James Gould Cozzens: Novelist of Intellect, p. 1). Mooney observes that "no other writer of our time has dared to make such an extreme commitment to reason; and this commitment has led Cozzens into an attitude toward man which dares to be condescending, anti-democratic, and altogether dispassionate." (p.1) Guard of Honor is a novel about the complex technical and human interrelationships which characterize the operation of an air base in Florida during World War II. It is not a war novel; rather it explores with balance, sophistication, and essential truth the kinds of problems and people that typically interact in the day-to-day operation of a complicated air base.

Cozzens chooses as his center of intelligence Colonel Ross, an ex-civilian lawyer who is a trusted staff officer to the base commander, General Beal. Ross both observes and acts to influence the events of the novel. He is a responsible, rational man, yet not by any means a cold or arbitrary man. During the 3-day period covered by the novel, General Beal is undergoing a crisis of confidence in himself. An effective combat leader, he faces his first large administrative command, and he has not yet found his bearings in the unfamiliar world of paperwork, protocol, and peace--as opposed to the violent, relatively simple crises he has faced as a combat air commander. Col. Ross, as his chief staff officer, in effect assumes command in meeting several crises. One of them involves a group of Negro officers who have become incensed at a physical assault on one of their members by a quick-tempered lieutenant colonel--a close friend of General Beal's--who is provoked into this act by a near-collision caused by the Negro officer's violation of flying rules. Col. Ross succeeds in averting a violent confrontation with the Negro officers. He arranges a conciliatory meeting of the injured Negro's father with a visiting inspector-general from Washington, while managing to undercut the plan of two young self-appointed liberal officers who try to provoke the violent confrontation. He then steps into the background as General Beal confidently reasserts his capacity and willingness to assume control. The novel explores in detail the personal and official relationships of a great number of people. Cozzens displays a remarkably perceptive awareness of the issues and actions honestly typical of air base problems, and in Colonel Ross he creates a self-aware, rational, conservative man who understands his responsibilities and limitations and who acts reasonably and humanely

within the framework of that understanding.

Guard of Honor is the finest novel yet written about the real world of the air corps. It stands as an excellent counterfoil to Joseph Heller's madly absurd masterwork, Catch-22. These two novels, each excellent in its own way, together with Command Decision and The War Lover comprise a foursome which sets worthy standards by which to judge those later novels which portray the U. S. Air Force as a separate military service. In literary merit few of the Air Force novels approach the level of excellence achieved by those talented professional writers as they draw upon the great drama of World War II for their themes and settings.

The transmutation of the Army Air Corps into the U. S. Air Force obviously was not an abrupt event. The forces leading toward the establishing of a separate Air Force had been at work for years before the culminating schism became officially recognized in 1947. Throughout World War II the Army Air Corps under General H. H. "Hap" Arnold operated with an autonomy in which the Army, somewhat reluctantly at times, concurred. Soon after the war it became obvious that military and political opinion was ripe for the separation of the air arm from Army control. Unfortunately the victory over the Axis powers which those military forces had done so much to bring about did not bring peace and tranquillity. The hot war merged immediately into the cold war, with our erstwhile ally, Russia, replacing the Japanese and Germans as antagonist. The confusing, bitter, often desperate struggle over Berlin became the battleground, and as the new Air Force struggled with its many and often unfamiliar problems of administration, personnel policy, maintenance, supply, and public relations it had suddenly to cope with

the great crisis precipitated by the Russian ground blockade of Berlin.

It is fitting that the first major fictional work dealing with the USAF is a novel that covers the time span and takes place chiefly in the setting of the tempestuous events in occupied Germany during the early postwar period. Leon Uris's Armageddon: A Novel of Berlin (not published until 1964) is a massive book of more than 600 pages, divided into four "Parts," each subdivided into conventional short chapters. The first three parts deal chronologically with the last phase of the ground war, the early problems with the Germans--and the Russians--in setting up the conditions and machinery of occupation, and the increasingly bitter conflicts with the Russians in Berlin over the governing of that destitute city. At the end of Part Three, the Russians have suddenly imposed their blockade of all surface transportation into Berlin from the Allied occupation zones to the west. Up to this point--about two-thirds of the novel's total length--the chief characters have been U. S. Army ground commanders at various levels, but the panoramic sweep of the novel has included also scenes involving individual Russian soldiers and many German characters. The political and military pressures in occupied Berlin, involving the 4-power governing body of the city as well as rival local German politicans, are vividly portrayed; the stage is set for the climactic treatment of the blockade and the magnificent Berlin Airlift operation which sustained the beleagured city and finally forced the Russians to lift their blockade.

This final part of the novel, subtitled "The Last of the Gooney Birds," is just under 200 pages in length and is devoted chiefly to showing how the great airlift effort was planned, organized, and run.

The American military commander in Occupied Germany, General Andrew

Jackson Hansen (obviously a fictional equivalent of General Lucius Clay), makes a trip back to Washington for a National Security Council conference with key military, State Department, and political officials, including the President, to decide how to react to the blockade. Hansen's impassioned plea for resistance instead of withdrawal includes a strong statement of confidence in the spirit of the people of Berlin to stand by the West in their crisis and cites the probable consequences of backing down in the face of Russian pressure. He ends his plea by saying "This is no ordinary city. Berlin . . . is our Armageddon . . . . In the name of God, Mr. President, the future of freedom on this earth requires our presence." (460). His plea carries the day; the President decides to stay in Berlin, which results in the great airlift effort.

Hansen then visits the retired General Hiram Stonebreaker at his home near Los Angeles and persuades him to accept recall to active duty to organize and command the air transport operation. Stonebreaker, a fictionalization of Lt. General William Tunner, agrees not only to return to duty but to assemble as many as possible of his staff from the old World War II days of flying supplies over the "Hump" of the Himalayas in Asia. With his top priority, he manages to get most of them (some are civilians, but most are still on active duty) assigned to his new headquarters in Germany, and the job of inaugurating the airlift begins. The novel takes a few shots at the USAFE commander General Morgan and at the "occupation country club" he runs in Germany: "Hiram [Stonebreaker], like Chip Hansen, was not a member of the WPPA (West Point Protective Association) and had had innumerable run-ins in the past with Morgan." (484) But Morgan reluctantly agrees to give Stonebreaker the support he needs, and the conflict between the two generals

is more of an aside than a major development in the novel. One brief exchange between Stonebreaker and one of his recalled staff officers, Clint Loveless, serves well to illustrate how these older Air Corps men view their relationships with the new Air Force they have just become:

> "By the way, sir. What am I?"
> Stonebreaker scratched his head. "Lieutenant Colonel, I think, vice chief of staff, or something."
> "Air Force or Army?"
> "Air Force. We're all Air Force. Even Buff Morgan and his country-club set." (487)

Uris presents these men as real heroes. Their organizational skill, their selfless devotion to duty, their technical ingenuity, and their ultimate success in feeding and supplying the blockaded city provide the climactic events of the novel. The ambiguities of feeling and action which characterize relationships between several individual American airmen and soldiers and the German natives are throughout the novel a chief focus of interest, and many scenes even in the last portion of the novel explore and develop these love-hate affairs. (See Hans Habe's Off-Limits as a complementary treatment of similar matters.) But as it depicts the newly formed U. S. Air Force, the novel is almost wholly honorific in its bias. As panoramic historical fiction the work is impressive in magnitude if not in depth. Uris set himself a prodigious task requiring extensive research and a comprehensive vision of these major international events. The Air Force takes a significant part in these events, and Armageddon is an auspicious fictional debut for the new service.

Another novel, much less ambitious and comprehensive in scope than Armageddon, deserves mention as a transitional novel of the Air Corps-Air Force years. Captain Newman, M. D., published in 1956 by Leo Rosten (the pen name of Leonard Q. Ross), is set, except for its epilogue, at

an Air Corps hospital during World War II. The title character and protagonist is a psychiatrist, eccentric even in a profession not noted for conformity, whose effective but unorthodox methods and attitudes provide a central thread of unity on which Rosten strings a series of mostly comic, sometimes pathetically touching episodes dealing with the hospital mental ward--its patients, doctors, and nurses--and the administrative command. Though set in wartime, the novel's focus and theme are not on the war itself but on the problems of mental illness. Among the engaging comic figures are Capt. Newman himself; Corporal Leibowitz, a brilliantly irreverent ward corpsman; Coby Clay, a patient who adamantly refuses to make his own bed (it's beneath his dignity, and he is obstinate without being in the least disrespectful in his refusal to yield to the insistent orders of his military superiors--like the clerk in Herman Melville's Bartleby the Scrivener who when asked by his employer to do a job replies pleasantly "I'd prefer not to"); and a hilarious group of Italian prisoners of war who perform at a base Christmas party. Among the serious characters whose problems evoke real pathos are Gino McGraw, who eventually commits suicide after being forsaken by his girl back home; Corporal "Little Jim" Tompkins, a waist gunner who blames himself for cowardice because he failed to rescue his friend from a burning aircraft, and who later is killed in a raid on Berlin; and Colonel Norval Bliss, an intellectually arrogant patient who thinks of himself as "Mr. Future" and turns out to be a repressed homosexual and transvestite.

The novel is fundamentally comic, and it presents a picture of the Air Corps--and in the epilogue, of the Air Force--which is finally sympathetic. Early in the book, Lt. Barney Alderson, the psychologist-narrator who works with Capt. Newman on the ward, observes:

> I was twenty-four, a second lieutenant in the Air Corps--and it was the Air Corps, not the Air Force, in those days, as the original words in the song about "the wild blue yonder" drummed into us. We wore our caps in that dashing pancake style, with the grommet removed, which distinguished us from the plebeian Army of which we were a rebellious and clearly superior province. (2)

And in the epilogue, Alderson reminisces about his days in the Air Corps and what some of the people and events meant to him. We learn that Capt. Newman married his nurse, and

> they settled in San Francisco, where he quickly became a most successful psychoanalyst. But Ward 7 had made it impossible for him long to accept such lucrative rewards, or so parochial a practice, and in 1953, making the most sardonic comments about his stupidity and his damnable conscience, he went back into the Air Force he had so long fought and fumed against. He is a lieutenant colonel now, in charge of the N. P. division at the huge Air Force hospital in _____. (327)

The book ends with a plea for reason, tolerance, and understanding by man of his fellowman--a humane polemic, written with sincerity and grace. Captain Newman, M. D. is a tolerant, good-humored book, not a well-unified novel, but like Ken Kesey's One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest an affirmation that the nominally insane often possess a unique sanity and that those who understand them best understand us all best. It is an entertaining commentary on an aspect of service life not commonly treated in fiction.

Chapter III

THE KOREAN WAR

Following the dramatic Berlin airlift, the next major Air Force involvement which might be expected to produce significant fictional treatment was the Korean War. Despite its length and the heavy national military involvement in that war, surprisingly little fiction has been written about the Air Force participation in it. Like Vietnam, it was unpopular, indecisive, and debilitating in its effect upon the military services. Further, the lack of national enthusiasm at home doubtless made it a less attractive subject for fiction writers than any major war up to that time in our nation's history. Two novels, however, do deal with Air Force operations in the war. One, Turn the Tigers Loose, was published in 1956 by Colonel Walter D. Lasly, who had commanded a squadron of B-26 night bombers and subsequently had served as Director of Operations of the B-26 wing based at Pusan in Korea. Colonel Lasly's book is overtly and admittedly propagandistic: he wrote it as a tribute to the men who flew the night bomber raids and who, unlike the jet fighter pilots, received little or no public recognition for their accomplishments. In the biographical sketch included at the end of the book, Colonel Lasly is quoted as expressing his view that

> Although the missions flown by these two wings [of B-26s] comprised almost all the Allied air effort for half of each twenty-four-hour day, very limited recognition of this effort has been made until now. It is my sincere hope that this work will give the public a cockpit view of that special breed of cat which prowled the roads and railroads of nighttime North Korea. (153)

Turn the Tigers Loose (a title which is not well-suited to the tone and the events of the book) is a short novel, told entirely through the point of view of its protagonist, Lieutenant Colonel Tom Loring, who begins the novel as commander of a squadron of B-26 Night Intruders whose mission is to interdict North Korean roads and railways at night. His own crew consists of Captain Nick George, navigator-bombardier, and Staff Sergeant "Splinter" Mulloy, gunner. Loring and his crew maintain an informal, often casual relationship with each other not at all untypical of such closely knit crews throughout the Air Force, but Loring as commander of both the crew and of the squadron is aware of a subtle difference from them in his professional Air Force commitment. Thinking of his crew as they fly northward on a mission, he muses:

> It was funny . . . how little anything seemed to bother Nick--or Splinter either, for that matter. No doubt they thought the same of him--but it was different for him, of course. Loring had devoted his whole life to the Air Force; he accepted the natural consequence of that, that a certain proportion of his time would have to be spent about like this--maybe in Korea, maybe in some even more forsaken place a year or two later. But take Nick George. What did a retread think about being called back for a second round of fighting? And what about draft-bait like Splinter? (16)

Loring answers--or at least addresses--his own questions in a passage which reveals both his own professional military view and the limitations of that view in dealing with larger ethical, or even political and military issues:

> The whole thing was, somebody had to do it. Never mind why. It wasn't up to anybody Tom Loring knew to ask why; the fact of the matter was, the job had to be done. There wasn't any sense in talking about it--but the "police action" had to be carried out, and that was what they were drawing pay for. (16)

It is a measure of Colonel Lasly's book that it holds forth unquestioningly for the traditional, "ours-not-to-reason-why" military

ethic which has been so seriously eroded in recent years by the circumstances under which the military has been constrained to fight both in Korea and in Southeast Asia.

Turn the Tigers Loose is honest in presenting the fear, the danger, the muted satisfaction of victory, and the sadness at the losses which accompany aerial combat. On a mission with his crew over North Korea,

> Loring began to get that funny, half jittery, half enraged tingle he called the "tiger" feeling. It wasn't blood lust, but it was something pretty close to it. It was the feeling of a man whose business is killing, about to do his best to destroy as many human lives as he could manage. It wasn't a personal thing; and maybe, Loring thought, that was the worst thing about it, because he couldn't deceive himself that he wanted to kill the gooks or anybody else.
>
> But that was the way the cards came. He had to play the hand he was dealt. (19)

This mission turns out to be a successful one: the crew bombs and strafes two convoys of enemy trucks, destroying ten to fifteen of them together with their cargoes of gasoline and small arms ammunition--and, of course, a number of the drivers. But even after their mission "Loring doubted seriously that the trucks and cargo they had destroyed would have paid for/the cost of the gasoline, bombs and ammunition they spent to get them--to say nothing of the costs of the supply and personnel lift required to get them there." (24-25) Such reflections pertain even more validly to the air war in Southeast Asia.

After becoming Wing Operations Officer, Loring flies a final mission with his old crew. His objective this time is specifically to become a "locomotive ace" by seeking out and destroying his fifth enemy locomotive, and the mission comes very near the end of the required combat tour for himself as well as for Capt. George and S/Sgt. Mulloy. They succeed in locating and attacking a train with bombs and strafing runs. The locomotive explodes, but Loring's B-26 is hit by flak from protective guns

aboard the train, and Splinter Mulloy is badly wounded by shrapnel. Loring flies the damaged plane back to base, but when Splinter dies en-route home Loring "felt like a fool for having thought that killing locomotives was important. Right then he would have been willing to trade the Reds the whole Santa Fe system for one grin from the redheaded gunner." (142) After landing, the remorseful Loring is met at the plane by the Wing Commander, Col. Lyle, a West Pointer and fellow careerist:

> The colonel saw the misery and dejection written in the younger man's face and when he spoke his rebuke was tempered with sympathy.
>
> "Loring, in this game you never reproach yourself for something like this. You do what you have to do the best way you can, and you accept your losses when they occur. You took this kid under your wing and you let yourself become attached to him as an individual instead of keeping yourself aloof from his personal life. I won't say that you were wrong or that I wouldn't have done the same thing, but this is the price you have to pay for that indulgence." (143)

Col. Lyle's words here convey a feeling and an attitude characteristic of the professional bias Lasly maintains throughout the book. War is not glorified, nor are the impulses and motives of those who fight, but the sense of duty, the burden of decision and command, the need for objectively understanding what must be done to accomplish missions make this novel thematically similar to Haines's Command Decision.

Among the many administrative problems Lt. Col. Loring must face are the inevitable and most often insoluble ones having to do with the people under his command. One concerns a distraught but generally dependable airman, Sergeant Thomas, who receives a "Dear John" letter from his wife telling him she has fallen in love with another man and asking for a divorce. Thomas leaves the base without authority, gets drunk, and misses an inspection the following morning. Loring, a bachelor who feels it unfair to subject a wife to the long separation and lonely responsibility

often required of women who marry into the service, deals sympathetically with Sgt. Thomas, who had returned voluntarily and remorsefully to duty, gives him a short leave to Japan to think through his response to his wife's request and to restore his emotional balance. The incident is well-handled and may well reflect similar problems Lasly himself had to deal with in his command assignments.

Another personnel problem concerns a young lieutenant who repeatedly aborts his assigned combat missions by claiming his aircraft does not operate properly. After one mission when Lieutenant Rimen aborts on take-off, Loring immediately takes the airplane and the remaining members of Rimen's crew on the assigned mission and proves to himself that there is nothing wrong with the B-26. Later in a confrontation Rimen admits that he has dishonestly failed to fly his missions and declares himself afraid of flying, which at that time was ample cause for administrative grounding without prejudice. Rimen had been commissioned at the end of World War II, discharged, college educated with aid from the GI bill, and recalled in 1950 for the Korean War. Loring believes Rimen to be a free-loader and feels that he owes the Air Force a debt for his subsidized education. He is totally unsympathetic to Rimen's views and to what he believes to be a clear-cut case of evasion of duty. He suspects Rimen is faking his fear simply to avoid combat--and in fact there was a rash of "fear of flying" declarations during the period of the unpopular Korean War, many of the cases involving involuntarily recalled reservists who for various reasons were reluctant to fly in Korea. Loring's dilemma is his inability to be certain of Rimen's motives; if he is in fact fearful of flying he should be indulged, because "actually, a pilot who had lost his nerve could perform no braver act than to admit it and ask to be relieved

of flying duty." (65) If, on the other hand, he simply was looking for an easy way to evade his share of the hazardous combat flying, he was being not only cowardly but unfair to his fellow pilots who accepted similar responsibilities without reneging. Loring feels he himself has failed as a leader when one of his pilots quits; further, he realizes that

> there were always Rimens who would have their cowardice quickly forgotten, or, more likely, never known outside their units. They went on home and joined veterans' groups and marched in the parades and got drunk at conventions and raised hell and were real big wheels. (64)

Nevertheless, Loring grounds Rimen and assigns him to administrative duty, but only after making it plain to him that his alleged fear of flying is not believed and that he has transferred his share of the flying burden to his fellow pilots. The case continues to obsess Loring, however, even after Rimen is found drunk on duty as officer-in-charge of the bomb dump together with another pilot similarly assigned ground duty. The other pilot, Lieutenant Terry, backs down on his alleged "fear of flying" and returns to flight duty leaving Rimen, now almost friendless, to continue working and drinking in his support job. Later, Lt. Terry does panic when trying to land a disabled plane in poor weather and flies into the ground, killing himself and his crew. Afterward, Loring reveals his continuing uncertainty about Lt. Rimen:

> "I don't know . . . . I still think Rimen's a yellow quitter. No panic. Nothing to keep him from flying, except he values his neck more than his honor . . . . But I'm glad I wasn't the C. O. of the Thirty-seventy." [Lt. Terry's squadron, whose commander refused to ground without prejudice the now-dead young pilot]. (123)

These incidents, together with vivid depictions of combat missions and realistic explorations of the operational and maintenance problems of a wing staff officer, contribute to a treatment of the Air Force

combat operations in Korea which is fundamentally sound and consistently interesting. Turn the Tigers Loose is a competent novel, limited in the depth of its characterizations, except for Lt. Col. Loring, the narrator, and by the somewhat narrow focus on the narrator with his often-restricted and restrictive views. None of the major issues of the Korean conflict--the purpose, the achievements, and the effects of the war or the great dissent which it provoked--are dealt with in this book. Only the case of Lt. Rimen even comes close to exploring the ethics of our involvement. But the novel is, within its self-defined terms, an honest account, loyal to the Air Force's institutional concept of itself and genuinely interesting and informative in dealing with the problems of combat command. Lasly did a workmanlike job in writing the book; his affection for his profession, his associates--and his B-26--is communicated with conviction. This venerable plane returned, like the famed C-47 Gooney Bird, to set new records along the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos during the war in Southeast Asia. Few who have ever flown it will disagree with Lasly's tribute in his final chapter to that "gallant ship" for which he holds "the same forgiving sentiment you hold for a love that was satisfying but is gone." (150)

The best Air Force novel yet written about the Korean War is James Salter's The Hunters (1956). Where Lasly's Turn the Tigers Loose is an encomium, The Hunters is closer to being a dirge. Where Lasly's hero barely scratches the surface of human relations, Salter (the pen name for Stanley Horwitz) probes deeply into the mind and feelings of his fighter pilot protagonist, Cleve Saville. Where Colonel Loring had simply accepted the imperatives of combat flying, Cleve Saville agonizes over them. Where Loring, like Laertes, tends to attack his problems head on,

Cleve Saville, like Hamlet, often broods with melancholy sensitivity over his uncertain sense of values. Where Loring simply acts to follow an ideal, Saville seeks agonizingly to define one. And where Loring's combat tour closes with nostalgic satisfaction, Saville's ends in an act of renunciation, after which his death in combat comes close to achieving the stature of tragedy.

The Hunters, which as a novel is far superior to the very poor motion picture which was made from it, is a serious treatment of the world and the values of the fighter pilot. Salter focuses the story chiefly through the mind of his protagonist. Captain Cleve Saville is a technically competent jet pilot who at 31 joins his combat squadron in Korea and must face the ultimate test of his competency in a context where the only acknowledged measure of success is enemy MIG's shot down in combat and where the swashbuckling wing commander, Colonel Dutch Imil, himself an 18-victory ace of World War II, runs his wing like a football team whose only aim is not just to win but to run up the score.

Cleve is already too mature, too willing to acknowledge the moral ambiguities of war, too aware of his own doubts and limitations, to enter without reservation into the youthfully exuberant, mindlessly enthusiastic world which Imil attempts to establish and sustain within the wing. But Cleve is competent: he becomes a flight leader; he earns respect from his fellow pilots; he even manages to shoot down a MIG in aerial combat. But quiet competence is not enough in Imil's melodramatic world, and Cleve's self-confidence is steadily eroded as the weeks and months go by without another victory. His growing disillusion is hastened by the spectacular rise to fame of a brash young lieutenant, "Doc" Pell, who combines a careless disregard for the unwritten rules of aerial ethics

with an opportunistic willingness to use half-truths and dishonest claims to further his budding career as Colonel Imil's protege ace. Despite himself, Cleve feels jealousy and hatred building up for the younger pilot:

> Daily, hourly, building up after every mission, during the talks with Carona, the evenings in the club, the nights in bed, running through the mind like a stream through the earth, cutting a path for itself, increasing in intensity, growing, dominating everything he did on the major plane of life, he hated Pell . . . . Of all the absolutes, Pell was the archetype, confronting him with the unreality and diabolical choice of a medieval play, the deathlike, grinning angel risen to claim the very souls of simple men. When he dwelt upon that, Cleve felt the cool touch of fear. There was no way out. He knew that if Pell were to win, he himself could not survive. (191)

Pell does win, and it is a measure of Salter's honesty and of the depth of his thematic questioning of the values inherent in this violent combat world that Cleve cannot and does not succeed or even survive within it.

Cleve has loved flying; he still does. But he is approaching a crisis even before he joins the combat squadron in Korea. He is not sure why he had *stayed* in the Air Force, and when his friends asked "he had never been able to give an answer." (6) The world of fighter planes attracted him but had become gradually less magnetic. Sometimes at night aloft "listening to the others who were up, two unseen killers perhaps, calling themselves Butcher Red and seeking themselves in the darkness, he had tried to think of [an answer], brief, true, understandable, but never could." (6) After the mission on which Pell gets his first (but dubious) credit for a MIG, Cleve ruminates about the successful flight:

> He still felt no more than a meager satisfaction at having participated in it; but he was also aware of some sort of mystic fulfillment, as if the fight were a kind of nourishment or a violent poison, repeated small doses of which would eventually confer immunity. (43)

Those ambiguous but honest feelings are typical of Cleve. Flying jet fighters has been his career; he does not want to fail at it in the ultimate test of combat. But the alternative to failure becomes less a sense of victory than simply a justification of his commitments to his profession and to himself. His doubts are temporarily allayed by his first combat victory. After shooting down the MIG and watching its pilot bail out successfully, "Cleve could not remember ever having doubted that he would know this heady, sweet surfeit. Instead, it was just as he had always felt it would be. He knew then that he would never lose." (86)

On an idyllic trip to Japan, Cleve meets Eico, the young daughter of a Japanese artist who had known Cleve's father before World War II. They fall in love, an experience which further divorces Cleve from the feelings and the values of his fighter pilot world. He admits to her his sole ambition: to measure up as a combat pilot, "not to fail." (141) But he recognizes the essentially negative quality of that value, the pride and fear and self-delusion which lie at its root. He leaves Eico, never to see her again, and returns to combat to face growing self doubt:

> He had come prepared to acquit himself, but now he was not sure. He had come for a climax of victory, but in a way he did not want that now. He wanted more, to be above wanting it, to be independent of having to have it . . . . He was a prisoner of the war. If he did not get MIGs he would have failed, not only in his own eyes but in everyone's. (168)

He feels that his friends consider him an old hand; they expect much of him. And "he would have seized anything that allowed him release. He dreaded the need of sacrificing himself on this pitiless, simple altar, of fighting for something he no longer had the strength to disdain: a place beside the next ace in the group. Pell." (169)

Every pilot in the wing both respects and fears, yet seeks an aerial

encounter with a skillful, almost legendary enemy pilot they have christened "Casey Jones." Cleve is not immune to the temptation, though he believes his desire to be futile:

> Casey Jones, whoever he was, to meet and take him high in the piercing blue of those northern skies, and then to stand up spitefully before them, to earn that gesture, that final voice. He discarded it as narcotic again and again, but it kept returning, one thing of merit, out of anonymity, out of failure. One clean mark for them all to see. To kill a champion. To know once more the breath of excellence, compared to which everything else was dross. (186)

But after a confrontation with Col. Imil at which he accuses Pell of abandoning his flight leader to be shot down while Pell pursues his next MIG victory, Cleve is repudiated publicly by Imil, whose later attempt at apology Cleve cannot bring himself to accept. His alienation from Imil and Imil's values is now complete, and the novel reaches its climax in a major air battle during which Cleve does in fact encounter and defeat the lauded Casey Jones, but in doing so loses his own young wingman, Lt. Billy Hunter--a name chosen no doubt to underscore the irony. Cleve knows that because of Hunter's death and the failure of his own wing cameras to operate properly, he cannot get the confirmation required to lay successful claim to his victory. Both Pell and Col. Imil are dubious when Cleve asserts that "Casey Jones" was shot down. They cite the lack of corroborating evidence:

> Cleve looked at them, one by one. Nothing was real. He heard a short, insane cough of contempt leave his lips. He did not know what he was thinking, only that he was far removed, farther than he had ever believed possible.
>
> "Oh yes, there is," he said blindly.
>
> "Who?"
>
> "I can confirm it." He drew a sudden breath. "Hunter got him."
>
> It came out almost subconsciously. Malice had brought it, and protest and the sweeping magnanimity that accompanies triumph, but, as soon as he had said the words, he realized there were no others that would have made it right. (236-37)

The magnanimous lie finally earns him inner peace, even if it comes at the expense of all he had thought he wanted. " . . . he had never imagined anything faintly like it, to have searched the whole heavens for his destiny and godliness, and in the end to have found them on earth." (237)

Following this climactic self-discovery, Cleve continues to fly. He still wants to win one for himself, but the urge no longer causes him to suffer. "He had endured it too long. It was a part of him, permanently burned in. He felt untroubled, not satisfied but insensitive at last. He had been cleansed." (238) There is little left to live for in his new-found maturity, for he cannot return to youth, to refashion a different life with different goals. His experience with Eico has shown him a new world, but it is already behind him, he feels. His self-recognition, his acceptance of what he is and of the net of responsibilities he has chosen, lead him onward toward the only end such a life can expect. He fails to return from a mission, and as the pilots try to piece together the circumstances of his disappearance, ironically it is Pell who, with a now-practiced awareness of the newsmen hovering about to get their day's story, pronounces Cleve's public epitaph--and gets himself in the press as a national hero. "That's right. I really mean it. He was the best, the greatest. He taught me everything I know about this business. It was just that he didn't get the breaks himself." (243) The reporters, like Col. Imil earlier, repress their doubts about Pell's sincerity. After all, like Imil, they too are in a game where losers get crocodile tears and winners get the glory. It is a final bitter irony which underscores the tragic implications of Cleve's lonely, agonizing struggle toward self-awareness. As for Cleve,

> the war ended in those final minutes of solitude he had always dreaded . . . . If there had been a last cry, electrically distilled/through air, it had gone unheard as he fell to the multitudes he feared. They had overcome him in the end, tenaciously, scissoring past him, taking him down. Their heavy shots had splashed into him, and they had followed all the way, firing as they did, with that contagious passion peculiar to hunters. (243-44)

So ends the novel, by far the best piece of Air Force combat fiction to come from the Korean War. Salter's vision informs the novel, and it is the vision of a man who has come to know the world of the flyer, and to see that world as representative in many respects of the broader world which encompasses it. Flying airplanes, constantly competing with oneself and others against demanding technical and physical standards, needing always to win a few at least in order to sustain self-respect, yet doomed so often by age or nature or luck to lose, and in the ultimate tests of combat knowing that to lose one is to lose all--this is a world that admits the possibility of tragedy. It is a measure of Salter's accomplishment in The Hunters that he approaches success in an honest attempt to evoke that tragic world.

More socially oriented than Salter's stark combat novel is Walter Sheldon's Troubling of a Star (1953). Set at a USAF fighter base in Japan during the Korean War, the novel develops the conflict between Captain Richard Tindle, an introspective but competent young pilot, and the forces of conformity and insensitivity represented by his commander, the self-righteous and priggish widower, Colonel William Straker. Sheldon takes his title from a phrase in Francis Thompson's poem, "The Mistress of Vision," which he uses as an epigraph to the novel: "Thou canst not stir a flower/without troubling of a star." Straker is overtly pursuing the star of a brigadier general, and the implication of the title is that

by disturbing and destroying the natural human feeling for beauty and compassion and mutual respect he forfeits any right to the star he covets so avidly. Tindle, a World War II vetran who has volunteered for recall to active duty as a pilot during the Korean War, returns to his squadron in Japan after a period of temporary duty as a forward air controller with the Army ground forces in Korea. His close-up view of ground combat and of the destruction caused by bombing and napalming has left him with serious doubts about his willingness to fly ground support and bombing missions. His doubts are intensified when he realizes more fully that Col. Straker's ambition is to make his F-80 wing the theater specialists in the use of napalm and thus to win the reputation that will make him a general. Straker has selected a staff officer with little experience and no stomach for combat flying to become commander of one of the F-80 squadrons. Major Pete Ronsdale, whose wife Esther finds him inadequate as a sexual partner and is furtively on the lookout for an adulterous relationship, betrays his insecurity on a bad-weather flight to Tokyo in a C-47. Later, on a mission with Ronsdale, Tindle destroys a North Korean locomotive, but Ronsdale takes credit for the kill and asks Tindle not to reveal the deception to their commander, Col. Straker. After a series of disagreements with Col. Straker, Tindle finally accuses him of hypocrisy, thus confirming an irrevocable enmity. Soon after, on a particularly difficult mission, Ronsdale freezes with fear while attacking a flak battery, and Col. Straker is shot down by the guns which Ronsdale could not attack. Stricken with remorse and desperation, Ronsdale suicidally dives his aircraft into an enemy tank. Tindle, spurred by the danger and the heat of combat, shoots well on this ground attack mission, then out-maneuvers and shoots down a MIG 15 which attacks

his aircraft. Ordered to shoot the parachuting enemy pilot, he refuses. He realizes his duty is to kill the enemy but concludes that the "military state" to which he is committed causes man to ignore his sense of moral right by encouraging a callous disregard of morality in small issues, which leads inevitably to the erosion of moral judgment in more important issues that often involve life itself. Returning to base, he finds that Col. Straker has been rescued and is now involved with the newly widowed Esther Ronsdale. Straker has decided to retire and enter church administrative work, presumably intending to marry Esther. He orders Tindle grounded for his refusal to obey orders, and the novel ends as Tindle rejects the Japanese girl he had learned to love in Tokyo and decides to send for his wife to join him in Japan for the remainder of his tour. The author indicates on the last page that the novel was completed at "3:57 p.m., November 7, 1951, United Nation Base Camp, Munsan, Korea."

Troubling of a Star is a grim novel of love and war, showing the weaknesses of men and women involved in a war-torn world, trying to live by pre-conceived standards but finding these standards inadequate to cope with the existential contingencies of loneliness and death. Tindle comes finally to accept the conditions of his humanity, to accept that the morality he wants to uphold exacts a high toll levied against his own ego. He cannot respect the Bible-reading, self-serving hypocrisy of Col. Straker nor the callous disregard of human rights and feelings which such hypocrisy leads to. But neither can he reconcile himself to a fundamentally dishonest affair with the young Japanese mistress he learns to love. Moral judgment must finally be rendered on himself if he is to defend honestly his right to impose it on others. At the novel's end, Tindle

emerges as a more self-aware, mature man, certainly not happy and hardly even daring to expect happiness in his private or professional life, but at least reconciled to the terms he has defined for himself as valid moral criteria by which to govern his life. In Troubling of a Star, as in Salter's The Hunters, the often simplistic values and virtues of the fighter squadron are shown to fail the morally sensitive man and to impel him to assert at great personal cost the more complex moral vision he shapes for himself out of his own well of experience and suffering. Despite a rather irrelevant group of episodes in Tokyo involving a middle-aged Air Force civilian employee and his Japanese mistress and house servant, Troubling of a Star is an effective exploration of both the social and professional stresses imposed on an Air Force unit at war.

Chapter IV

POST KOREA: THE PEACETIME AIR FORCE

More than a dozen novels have been written about the peacetime operations and social life within the Air Force between the Korean War and the period of heavy involvement in Southeast Asia. This number does not include the almost equally numerous "doomsday" novels which involve the Air Force Strategic Air Command and which constitute a grouping with enough thematic similarity to constitute a sub-genre which will be dealt with in the next chapter. The Air Force novels of peacetime, unlike the doomsday novels, are thematically varied. Some, like Gray's The Penetrators, Master's Fandango Rock, and Salter's The Arm of Flesh treat the combined social and operational worlds of the Air Force and attempt to present a picture of service life which is essentially realistic. One novel, Scott's Look of the Eagle is primarily an adventure yarn about flying, complete with jet missions, spies, and a daring incursion into China and North Korea. Others, like Sheldon's Tour of Duty, Houston's Between Battles, and Ballard's fine work The Long Way Through exhibit Air Force life from the viewpoints of protagonists whose attitudes toward that life vary from qualified sympathy to downright hostility. The comic view of the Air Force is represented during this era by such novels as Tarr's The Conversion of Chaplain Cohen, Arkell's whimsical British viewpoint in The Miracle of Merriford, and Singer's often hilarious Wake Me When It's Over. Together these novels of the Air Force in peacetime present a composite portrait which provides, like some of the optical

illusions of modern pop art, a multi-faceted perspective on service life. They vary greatly in quality and in intent, their only common characteristic being the focus on life in an Air Force setting.

Anthony Gray (actually a pseudonym for Benjamin G. Aston) in The Penetrators (1965), like Colonel Lasly in Turn the Tigers Loose, has written an admittedly propagandistic novel with the aim of advocating a mixed force of manned bombers and intercontinental ballistic missiles as our Air Force strategic armament. In a foreword to the novel, Gray contends that "in ten years [from the 1965 copyright date of the book] McNamara's present policies will have painted us into a nuclear corner" by reducing SAC's manned bomber fleet to "a few hundred obsolete hulks" (9) and thereby forcing us to rely primarily on the relatively inflexible and catastrophically destructive missile force. Gray's foreword, and the novel, argue persuasively for the development of a modern high-Mach bomber. He claims that

> armed with conventional bombs it would be our only strategic hope should mankind, as usual permitting his instinct for survival to restrain him from complete self-elimination, nevertheless express in the next ten or fifteen years his inherent tribal urges in his characteristic way. (11)

The Penetrators is as much a political novel as an Air Force novel. Its protagonist is a Royal Air Force Group Captain, Malcolm Scott, who is on duty at USAF Strategic Air Command headquarters as a senior officer of the Strategic Target Planning Staff. Working with him is his junior USAF assistant, Major Zach Chandler. Both of these men are disturbed at the trend to replace the manned bomber with ICBM's, but they both have great respect for General Hub Younger, a missile advocate who is evocative of General Bernard Schriever. The Air Force Chief of Staff, on the other hand, is portrayed as fighting a losing battle in his advocacy of

the manned bomber's role in what he prefers as a mixed bomber-missile combined force. General Halsted Norwood is in many respects analogous with General Curtis LeMay. In a brief rendezvous in Washington before appearing before a Congressional committee, General Norwood and Group Captain Scott find themselves agreeing to advocate the manned bomber, but not for the same reasons. Scott, whose article in a professional journal has gained him this small notoriety as a worthy ally of the Chief of Staff in the political fight, insists that it is their versatility in terms of accurate delivery, the possibility of recall after launching, and the capability to deliver conventional weapons in non-nuclear wars which combine to prompt his advocacy of manned bombers. Although pleased to find a young and intelligent fellow-advocate, General Norwood tells Scott:

> "All right then. . . . We both advocate manned bombers. I advocate them because they do carry nuclear weapons, and will wipe out an enemy more surely than ballistic missiles. You advocate them for reasons which are less clear to, say, the average senator. Suppose you simply back my contention, so as not to confuse the civilian? First, that the manned bomber carries a nuclear load vastly superior to the ICBM. Second, that it delivers it a hell of a lot more accurately. And third, that ballistic missiles, since they can't be tested individually in war games, can't be trusted to work?" (119)

"But Scott is not prepared to take such a fervent anti-missile view nor to abandon his contention that manned aircraft can offer an alternative to all-out nuclear conflict. Both Scott and Norwood testify, but the counter-advocacy of General Younger and his pro-missile senatorial allies appears to carry the day at the congressional hearing. In an accidental opportunity to speak with the President at a social affair that evening, Scott rashly dares to bring up the subject. The exchange is embarrassing to the bystanders, but Scott is persistent in a most

"un-English" manner:

> "It's a question, sir, of what you, or really, one of your successors might do ten years from now in a certain emergency."
>
> "I hardly know what will come up tomorrow," the President said mildly, "let alone ten years from now."
>
> "At any rate," Malcolm Scott said, "we know that there'll be no proper U.S. bomber command around at the time. Assume that the eastern bloc, as they will, will still have modern, lately developed manned aircraft. Assume that they choose to send them to attack the continental United States with non-nuclear weapons. When this country can retaliate only with weapons of nuclear mass destruction, weapons which can't, once committed, be called back." (181-82)

The discussion ends inconclusively, but clearly Scott has proposed a real dilemma. He is convinced, however, that his arguments need the bolstering of more conclusive evidence, and the plot of the remainder of the novel deals with how Scott returns to England, ostensibly for a brief staff visit, carrying with him the target data necessary to make possible a convincing, dangerous, but, he believes, necessary mock raid on U.S. strategic bases by British bombers. The audaciously daring plan is known only to a like-minded British Air Vice-Marshal, Sir Ronald Kimball, who has given his approval to the mock photographic raid in order to convince the United States authorities of the mutual western need for advanced manned bombers by showing the vulnerability of U.S. strategic missiles to attack by such forces. Despite the untimely death of the aging Sir Ronald, Scott manages to recruit crews for a force of nine aircraft, three flights each of three Vulcan bombers, to execute the raid, acting against the countermanding orders of the British Air Ministry. Because of a rather improbable series of events, USAF Major Zach Chandler, who has followed Group Captain Scott to England, is forced to accompany Scott in his lead bomber. The three flights proceed from England to the U.S. along three separate routes, evading U.S. radar defenses. Despite an accidental contact with an offshore naval ship which

gives the alarm, the planes successfully photograph several missile sites, control installations, and even SAC headquarters near Omaha. Scott's aircraft is hit by a Falcon missile from a U.S. Air Defense Command fighter near Washington, killing the navigator. The plane is forced to crash land, fatally wounding Scott, but Major Chandler survives, escaping from the burning plane with the films Scott had taken during his run over the target.

The final chapter of The Penetrators depicts a hurriedly called conference in the Pentagon War Room. Chandler is a participant, together with the Secretary of Defense (obviously a fictional representation of Robert McNamara), the Chief of Staff, an unnamed NORAD general, and the SAC commander. The Secretary of Defense becomes the villain of this affair. He insists in a phone call to the President that the successful penetration by the British planes be hushed up with a phony public release saying that the crash had occurred because of bad weather, which caused a British plane on a goodwill mission to become lost and crash in attempting to find its way to Washington. The Secretary learns a valuable lesson in the possibilities of manned bomber penetration, and even General Younger, the missile advocate, argues, "They did penetrate. I'd like to think he [Scott] taught us something."

> "He did," the Secretary said slowly. "He did, Hub. But don't you think this administration is as capable of using what we learned as the opposition?"
> "I imagine."
> "Then let us take a shot at it."
> Hub Younger took a deep breath. "I think control of news is blind road, Mr. Secretary. Some day we'll lose our credibility."
> "The Government has an inherent right to lie to protect itself," the Secretary said. (312-13)

The Secretary's position--and the implications of his final statement--are too offensive for Major Chandler to abide. He says nothing at

the conference, but later that evening he determines to act. About to reveal his knowledge to a Washington correspondent of a London newspaper, Chandler realizes he is sacrificing his Air Force career, the security of his family, and his hopes for success and eventual retirement, but he nevertheless speaks the novel's final words to the correspondent:

> "I have a roll of film here for you . . . . A roll of film and a story." (314)

The novel obviously insists on Scott's point of view and on Major Chandler's moral duty to publicize it. In a sense it is an exposé novel similar to some of the "doomsday" works like Fail-Safe or Seven Days in May. But here the issue is dealt with in terms not of national peril from technical or human error but of crucial strategic decisions which are purported to be made both unwisely and deceptively. The novel implies serious accusations against both the judgment and the ethics of senior Air Force civilian and military authorities. Improbable as the plot may be, the novel is deadly serious in its apparent intent both to expose dangers and to advocate alternatives. Like most overtly propagandistic fiction, it overstates its case and is guilty of creating many straw men to oppose the forces of rightness, as the novelist interprets these forces. But the work is not without interest. Many episodes are well done, and there are minor characters and incidents which tend to domesticate the starkness of the basic story line and to fill out the fictional world with human interest. Chandler's family, Scott's secretary at SAC headquarters, and Scott's daughter and her lover in London all have significant minor roles to play. Gray's narrative skill does much to combine these diverse elements into a minor but creditable novel of its kind.

A less effective work, which presents a very unsavory view of the

operations within a ballistic missile manufacturing plant, reflects most unfavorably on many senior Air Force officers involved in the development and procurement of missiles. Jefferson Sutton's The Missile Lords (1963) is an episodic, uneven book which shows the almost incredibly corrupt, dog-eat-dog, sell-at-all-costs world of the public relations department of a large missile corporation. Though not set within the Air Force, it does portray among its minor characters several senior Air Force officers who almost without exception are shown to be easily corruptible. One, a Colonel Otis Hammond, visits the plant as a representative of the Ballistics Systems Division to get information for his boss, General Barman, to use in testifying before a congressional hearing on missile procurement. Hammond is given a tour of the plant by a senior company executive, then wined, dined, and bedded by the nubile secretary of a senior company official as an integral part of the company's selling policy. Another ex-officer, a retired Air Force Lieutenant General, Lyman Stark, has been hired as a company vice-president expressly because of the influence he can and does exert on his active duty friends in the Air Force procurement chain of command. The circumstance of his hiring leaves little doubt about the company's motives:

> . . . the need of a new ICBM arose . . . and Midwest Aeronautical Corporation received the development contract. More properly, an Air Force general named Lyman Stark had seen the need of another ICBM, "in order," he said, "to broaden the base of our industrial output to assure continued production under atomic attack." Supported by obscure but powerful forces, his view prevailed; the Monarch was born. This was the same Lyman Stark who, upon his subsequent retirement, became executive vice-president of Western Aerospace, the division created by Midwest Aeronautical Corporation for the express purpose of producing this new addition to the nation's arsenal. Since, the stockholders had little reason to complain. (19-20)

Later, Stark's name is prominent at the congressional hearings which

bring out the wholesale hiring of retired Air Force generals by the nation's aircraft ballistic missile industry. A senior company officer ruminates about the company's various officials: "As for Stark, the company knowingly bore the cross. 'The general who gave the Monarch to Midwest Aeronautical Corporation,' he was fair game for any congressional investigator beating the woods. Still, he was well worth the price." (225-26) The implications are obvious: not only is Stark a valuable influence peddler, but those active duty cronies who are susceptible to his peddling are themselves equally corrupt. The novel paints a picture of sordid maneuverings throughout the development and procurement process, and although the chief focus is on the company's own structure, the Air Force is revealed to have a major share in the corrupt practices which the novel is obviously written to expose. The Missile Lords adds its bit to the combined impact of many other novels of the 1960's in showing the military services to be in thrall to the insidious forces of power and immorality.

Much more sympathetic to the Air Force is John Master's Fandango Rock (1959) set at a Strategic Air Command base in Spain during 1958. Masters is an experienced novelist (Bhowani Junction, The Road Past Mandalay, Coromandel!, Nightrunners of Bengal, Bugles and a Tiger, and others) and an accomplished story teller. Fandango Rock is chiefly concerned with the cultural shock and the conflicts caused by the encroachment of a SAC base on a small Spanish city. Its chief interest is in the tempestuous love affair of Catherine Fremantle, the daughter of the base Information Officer, and Cesar Aguirre, a young aristocratic matador whose extreme right-wing views lead him to oppose violently the incursion of Americans into his native land. "Kit" Fremantle is also loved by Captain

Bill Lockman, pilot of one of the SAC aircraft on duty at Medina Lejo base, whose jealousy of the Spaniard culminates in an ineffective physical assault on Cesar after which Catherine becomes Cesar's mistress. A sub-plot concerns the love of Cesar's sister for Master Sergeant Pete Olmbacher, a sturdy, thoroughly upright Air Force Maintenance Chief, whose plebeian background and enlisted status offend the aristocratic dignity of the snobbish but admirably brave and determined brother. The novel depicts the rather naive but well-intentioned efforts of Major Fremantle, the SAC Information Officer, backed initially by the much more perceptive Base Commander, Colonel Lindquist, to devise a program of good-will activities involving joint social involvement by the people of the base and the Spanish community. Largely through the machinations of Cesar and a small group of like-minded Spanish John Birchers, these programs are subverted and turned into anti-American influences on the local populace. It is somewhat incongruous that the strange love-hate relationship between Cesar and Catherine is sustained throughout these divisive and often violent events, which bear some resemblance to the problems faced by Shakespeare's star-crossed lovers in Romeo and Juliet. An aircraft crash on take off, which kills not only the USAF pilot but a young Spanish boy hit by the disabled plane, brings the problems to crisis. A high level conference is called at the base, involving the American Ambassador, the female Undersecretary of the Air Force, and two Air Force generals. All are concerned over the public relations in Spain, especially because of the sensitivity of the Spanish to a recent "H-bomb" incident (presumably a reference to the famous "lost bomb" incident in Spain which actually created a furor at about the time the novel is set). Colonel Lindquist is against any appeasement of Cesar Aguirre

and his anti-American hard-liners by limiting the off-base movement of his airmen. He states his case forcefully to the assembled conferees:

> "Every suggestion made so far would have the effect of degrading the United States Air Force, and I do not propose to be a party to any of them. We are here to fulfill a certain mission, as a result of a treaty freely arrived at between our government and a foreign government. We don't want to be here and they don't want us to be here, any more than we'd like foreign troops on American soil. The treaty may be unnecessary, or unwise. That's not my affair. But as long as I command here we will not slink about our business as though we were criminals. We will not hide on the base. We will not pretend we are Spaniards. We will not pretend to like what we don't like. We will stand for what we stand for, with good manners, I hope--but firmly." (284)

Lindquist's position carries the day, and the U.S. officers arrange for a mutual funeral for the pilot and the young Spaniard in the local Catholic cathedral. In a tense scene outside the church a flare-up of emotions occurs, but the forbearance of the pilot's bereaved mother averts a violent upsurge, and the funeral proceeds peacefully. It proves to be the hoped-for catharsis to the pent-up resentments of both the U.S. airmen and the Spanish community. The affair between Cesar and Catherine ends in a bittersweet scene of renunciation. Both are aware at last of a deep-seated incompatibility which would prevent their ever sustaining a happy marriage. The cultural and religious differences, her fundamentally democratic and his fundamentally aristocratic outlooks, are too firmly established to compromise successfully, and at the end it is likely that Catherine and Bill Lockman will be reconciled. But Sergeant Olmbacher does win Cesar's sister, so the implication of unbridgeable cultural differences is thus somewhat qualified.

Fandango Rock, although often melodramatic, nonetheless attempts to portray fairly the problems faced by the Air Force in maintaining a foreign base in spite of the inevitable tensions and conflicts with local

attitudes and customs. It shows the naivete of U.S. attempts to treat foreigners in their own country as though they were Americans, but it also shows that tolerance, understanding, and good will can achieve much in resolving such problems. The picture of the Air Force which Masters paints is on balance a favorable one, and his novel illuminates a situation which Air Force members frequently must face in their assignments to foreign bases.

In The Hunters, James Salter demonstrated a technical facility and an uncompromising tragic vision which portended better work to come. His next novel, The Arm of Flesh (1961), comes close to fulfilling the promise of significant fiction. Employing a series of first-person narrators, like Faulkner's in As I Lay Dying, and a bleakly pessimistic existential outlook, like Albert Camus's in The Stranger, Salter in this novel makes greater demands on the reader than those in any Air Force novel yet written. His technique requres the reader to provide the transitions and to make for himself many of the observations a more traditionally omniscient author-narrator supplies by his own comment on character and action. Of the fifty-five separate first-person narrations which make up the book, fifteen are by Captain Isbell, the Operations Officer of a jet fighter squadron stationed in Germany at an unnamed base very like the one at Fürstenfeldbruck, near Munich. Isbell provides the chief focus for the book, but much of the story is also told by Major Walter Clyde, the Squadron Commander--a total of seven episodes--and by five squadron pilots, each of whom narrates four episodes. Other short scenes are narrated by several other squadron pilots, a Canadian pilot of a nearby RCAF base, a pilot from another fighter group, an airman operations clerk, Ernestine Clyde (the CO's wife), Marian Isbell (wife of Capt.

Isbell), and a German girlfriend of Lt. Cassada.

Cassada is a major thematic character in the novel although he is never given a first-person episode to narrate. He is therefore known only as he is seen and evaluated by the other characters. Yet with his youthful capacity for love, for ideals, for loneliness and hope, he becomes a kind of touchstone by which the various lives of the other characters can be evaluated. His selflessly naive but beautiful love for Lommi, a local German girl, is the one really purposeful human relationship in the book.

Cassada's relationships with his commander and with several squadron pilots are central to the novel's theme. At their first meeting, his commander, Major Clyde, confuses Cassada's name with that of the famous Air Force World War II general, Pete Quesada, because of the similarity of the two names. When Cassada says he is no relative of the famed general, Clyde abruptly loses interest in him and mentally types him as another young lieutenant neither "roaring" nor "full of bull" enough to make it as a fight pilot. Other episodes reveal how many of the other pilots follow their commander's lead in not even trying to accept the young man; he becomes the innocent sacrificial butt of snide remarks and squadron "in" jokes. But he works hard at trying to establish himself in the squadron. Only Captain Isbell is inclined toward sympathy and understanding, but even he cannot bring himself to voice his concern; the squadron is too clannish for the operations officer to risk his prestige by openly embracing the cause of an unproven outsider. Once, after seeing Cassada's reaction to a humiliating cartoon barb aimed at him by someone who annotated it for the squadron bulletin board, Isbell thinks, "Courage, my boy. . . . Indifference. The torments vanish. Who knows what will

follow? You mean something to them. Ridicule is a first proof of love." (75) But Isbell's hopeful thoughts are not to bear fruit. Cassada remains the squadron scapegoat, and later at coffee one morning after the two had flown a brief training flight Isbell almost reveals his repressed feelings:

> "Captain," [Cassada] said, "all I want is for somebody around here, somebody with authority, to have a little confidence in me. That's all."
> "That'll come," I said. "In the meantime just keep making yourself ready."
> "For what?"
> "For everything you really expect to be."
> "I don't know, sir," he said, "I just don't understand, I guess."
> Of course not, because I couldn't say it, like phrases of love saved up and when the time comes nothing is there. The act must serve.
> There was suddenly a great deal I wanted to say. We could have talked. He could have told me what he was going to be. I might have believed him. I wanted to push the plates aside and lean forward on my elbows, explaining it all while dust floated sideways through bolts of sunshine and the eggs turned cold, but somehow we started eating in silence and I found that I couldn't begin. (99-100)

Salter opens his novel with an event which becomes a framework for the entire story. Major Clyde is called to the mobile control unit at the end of the runway to monitor and assist the ground-controlled approach (GCA) attempt of two squadron pilots returning from a flight with very low fuel reserves in bad weather. Only later are the identities of the pilots revealed. Capt Isbell, the flight leader who had decided to fly the leg despite the bad weather, has lost his radio and is flying the wing of the inexperienced Lt. Cassada, who must follow with calm precision the instructions of the GCA operator in order that the planes may land safely. The episodes that deal with the suspenseful attempt to get the planes down are interspersed at intervals throughout the book to form a sort of plot line along which the other flashback episodes are strung.

After several missed appraoches, Cassada's plane runs out of fuel and crashes; Isbell ejects and parachutes. Cassada is killed, but Isbell survives.

Isbell himself, shaken up but unhurt after his parachute landing, lies abed with his frigid wife and endures his remorse:

> . . . I long for innocence like a murderer. I yearn for the past. It doesn't seem futile. It seems I can achieve it, walk once again through the hopeful, possess the used-to-be. (158)

After all, Isbell rather spitefully and certainly with arrogant pride had ordered the final leg of the flight through weather he knew to be potentially dangerous. He thinks:

> We parted without a word; that's all I can think of. There are so many things I intended to say. There is so much I almost told him. I can't understand why I didn't. I was waiting for something, a word that would fall, an unguarded act. I felt it was only a matter of patience. I wanted to be certain. . . . In the semidarkness all this returns to me, vaguely, like times forgotten. Suddenly, now that it's too late, I am sure he bore something we missed, something more than his own, the sum of our destinies. (159)

The remaining episodes of the novel depict the aftermath of the accident. One deals with the funeral, at which the Chaplain delivers a eulogy filled with abstract Christian clichés, empty and untrue either to Cassada or to the feelings of his fellow pilots and the mourners who survive him. Later episodes show a callous young lieutenant, who has been appointed Summary Court Officer to dispose of Cassada's personal effects, as he rifles through Cassada's papers and gets Lommi's address, presumably for a future attempt at seducing her. There is a brief episode showing the distraught girl trying to find out what has happened to her lover, and one which depicts the adulterous Ernestine Clyde desperately but futilely trying to reestablish some real human contact with her callous husband, then a final episode in which the Isbells go to the

train station to see another couple off for home at the end of their overseas tour. Isbell imagines a similar end-of-tour farewell for himself, Marian, and their children in a few months. He foresees the train trip to the aerial port of embarkation at Frankfurt, and the novel concludes with his imagined ruminations aboard the train as they travel through the German countryside:

> I watch it unfold, for the first time it seems and the last. My eyes devour everything, and at the same time hardly make out the things as they pass. I don't know exactly what I'm thinking. It seems to have all been a long struggle which I can't tell whether I've won or lost. I can hardly remember parts of it. The rest is still clear. But it's all behind, falling behind. There's no use trying to save anything. After a while you begin to understand that. In the end, when it's all over, you get on a train and sit there looking at the river. (183)

The style, as well as the attitude here, suggests the feeling of malaise, the awareness of a pointless life in a pointless world where the only real virtue is merely enduring the inevitable life of quiet desperation. It is a tone that pervades much of the novel, except for those flying episodes when exultancy, a sense of beauty, a spirit of expansive good will, a moment of sheer terror, or a feeling of powerful well-being brings to the world of these men their small quotient of meaning and richness in life. Only Cassada--the unknown, the eternal youth, the often-scorned but only loved man of the group--only Cassada may find on earth the meaning which makes existence become life, and Cassada is the only one to die. Salter's view is bleak, but his vision is firm and uncompromising. No melodrama artificially lights up his Air Force world, and no happy ending or inspiring future brightens the existential now of this strangely moving novel. Salter could have used a tighter plot to lessen the diffusive effect of some of his flashback episodes, but the reader who is willing to do more than a passive reading of <u>The Arm of</u>

Flesh will be rewarded by an honest and engaging experience. As a literary work, it is the best novel written about the Air Force since the Korean War.

Look of the Eagle (1955) by Robert L. Scott, Jr., is also about the men who fly jet fighters, but it is an altogether different sort of novel from The Arm of Flesh. Scott, a West Point career officer whose World War II novel, God Is My Co-Pilot, was a best-seller, aims in Look of the Eagle to tell an adventure story about an old pilot, Colonel Steve Dallas, who finally must face grounding but whose final climactic fling includes leading a contingent of twenty-five new F-84's from the factory on Long Island westward across the Pacific to Okinawa, where they are to be turned over to the Nationalist Chinese Air Force on Taiwan. Upon arriving on Okinawa, Dallas makes a rendezvous with an old World War II crony, "Atlas" Strong, who persuades him to undertake a CIA-approved mission over China into North Korea, ostensibly to rescue another old friend and fellow World War II pilot, Henry Yee, who as an American spy is serving as a major in the Red Chinese Air Force--all this to be done in a superannuated C-46 with Chinese Air Force markings.

The first half of the novel is plausible enough in recounting the flight of the jets in three legs from Long Island to Great Falls, to Elmendorf, to Okinawa. Scott's own knowledge and love of flying come through clearly as he describes the briefings, the take-offs, the navigation, the air-to-air refueling rendezvous, and the club parties which punctuate each leg of the flight. These flight legs give Colonel Dallas ample time to review in flashback memories of his flying career and of his experiences in China with Chennault during World War II, so that by the time the planes land at Kadena, the reader is prepared for the meeting

with the old friends who are to be involved in the daring mission to China and North Korea.

Up to this point the novel has been a panegyric to flight, somewhat maudlin and overwritten in places, but essentially straightforward and believable. Scott repeats the "footless halls of air" metaphor from Magee's well-known poem "High Flight," and his style tends toward romantic overkill, just as the title suggests: non-flyers are "paddle-footed people"; weather officers are called "High Overcast"; and the "surly bonds of earth" are cast off repeatedly with properly exuberant zest. But the flight episodes contain the best writing in the book, and the portrait of Steve Dallas as a man past his flying prime, a man who has difficulty in reconciling his love for flying with his love for his wife, who loves her "second only to a fighter ship," (52)--the portrait is stereotypic of the wild-blue-yonder pilot who never forgets that the mission of the Air Force is to fly and to fight, and who fights a prospective desk job with the same deception, tenacity, and desperation he would employ against an enemy MIG.

Once the mission to China begins, however, the novel becomes wildly improbable. Dallas and "Atlas" Strong manage to nurse the C-46 northward from Okinawa, across the East China and Yellow Seas, eastward across the Gulf of Chilli into China, then back westward to Antung and the North Korean base across the Yalu River where they expect to find their friend, Henry Yee. He is there all right, but instead of needing rescue, he and "Atlas" have plotted this ruse to get Colonel Dallas to fly into the base so that the three of them can steal a new Russian jet bomber for the U.S. and fly it back to Okinawa. The plans are discovered, however, and in the frantic attempt to escape, Yee is shot by the Red Chinese, "Atlas"

runs take-off interference for the jet bomber in the old C-46 and is killed in the attempt, and Dallas successfully flies the Russian craft back to Kadena with Yee's dead body aboard. At the book's end he is reluctantly settling into his newly-assigned job as a desk pilot, plotting to escape it and flee back into the air at the first opportunity.

The book is an adventure yarn and very little else. Characters are stereotyped; plot is melodramatic; action is all. For those who are young--even in heart--the novel will have its appeal. As a picture of Air Force life, it is an unreal but entertaining story which requires a wholehearted commitment to Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief."

Another much more serious book should be noted here. Like the first half of Scott's novel, it is devoted to a jet flight. But Richard Bach's Stranger to the Ground (1963) is a personal narrative account of a night F-84F flight from Wethersfield, England, to Chaumont, France, flown via Spangdahlem and Wiesbaden, Germany, to evade an area of bad weather. Bach was an Air National Guard pilot recalled with his unit during the Korean crisis and assigned temporarily at Chaumont Air Base in France. Like Colonel Dallas, in Scott's novel, Bach reminisces during the flight about his background, his schooling, his aviation cadet training, and his experiences in flying the F-84, as well as engaging in some philosophizing on his attitudes toward war, his prospective Russian enemy, and his commitments as a military pilot. That the hazardous mission is undertaken to deliver some classified documents to Bach's commander is an aspect of the flight about which the author does not comment--but to know the contents of many such documents is to perceive an element of unintended irony in the story. Nevertheless, Bach is obviously sincere in the account; the well-written narrative is effective in conveying the feel of

the jet pilot's world. Technically, the book does a superb job of describing in laymen's terms the processes of jet flying and navigation. As Gill Robb Wilson writes in his introduction to the volume, the book reveals, "the determination of a young man . . . in combat with storm and night and fear." (x) Stranger to the Ground, comparable to Antoine de St. Exupery's noted writings on flight, deserves a place in the literature of the Air Force. Bach's techniques in shaping his story are appropriate to fiction, despite the factual basis of his subject.

A much more ambitious book than Bach's short personal narrative of flight, but equally concerned with actual historical events, is Bronco Aleksich's The Greatest of These (1972). This illustrated historical novel announces in the preface its intent to record in fictional form the changes in fighter aircraft development and in the kind of pilots the Air Force acquired to fly these fighters during the decade following the Korean War. The novel covers a two-year period from January, 1956, through December, 1957, in the history of a fictional F-102 group stationed at Bettingen Air Base in Western Germany near Trier, patterned apparently on Bitburg Air Base. It is an inordinately long book, running to 615 pages, plus illustrative material, a glossary of Air Force technical terms, and a twenty-seven page "Prologue," much of which is repeated verbatim in a chapter near the end of the novel. Aleksich includes much expository material of a kind not normally included in a work of fiction. There are technical discussions of the F-102 aircraft, its armament systems, and its flying characteristics, as well as detailed analyses of such Air Force lore as spins and recovery techniques, night flying problems, tactical evaluation exercises, mission briefings, hydroplaning hazards, and squadron parties, all of which contribute to the bulk and

air of knowledgeability of the work even while further diffusing the episodic narrative structure. The book is seriously flawed as a novel, even though it does impress as a serious effort to show literally everything about the operations and life of a fighter squadron over a two-year span.

The book's protagonist is Captain (later Major) Angus Saginaw, a serious, history-minded career pilot who agonizes over the changes that occur in his personal and professional life. He comes to believe that the Air Force fighter pilot, faced with increasingly less freedom of choice and initiative in the tactics of his trade, has lost the feeling of personal involvement, pugnacity, and pride in himself which traditionally have marked this most glamorous and self-confident element of the Air Force's flying cadre. Hawkish and single-minded, Saginaw argues with his group commander, Colonel (later Brigadier General) Sidney Baugh, that the United States has lost its will to fight and appears doomed to a moral and spiritual decline analogous to the decline and fall of Rome, an argument not infrequently heard in national political debates of the 1960's and '70's. Though intensely individualistic, Saginaw is a respected flight commander whose ideas on tactics and training do much to sustain morale and to foster combat readiness in a unit whose main mission is all-weather radar-controlled air defense rather than the more exciting close support and air superiority role of the tactical air command.

The novel explores in detail both the personal and professional roles of several officer pilots of the fictional 39th Fighter Interceptor Squadron: Major Oatway, an excellent staff officer who fails as the squadron's first commander; Lieutenant Colonel Dragan, the jet ace who

loses control of both his command and his wife because of a too-intense concern for his own glamorous image; Lieutenant Jeremy Zweig, a talented young Jewish pilot whose initiative and talent often result in his motives and accomplishments being misinterpreted; Captain Kirby Hazelhurst, who marries a beautiful fraulein waitress at the Officers' Club; and several lieutenants whose amorous activities involve them in complications not uncommon among young pilots in the Air Force. Angus Saginaw himself becomes entangled in an affair with the young wife of one of his lieutenants, which culminates in her desertion of her husband to join Angus at his future Pentagon assignment. All these complications in the personal lives of the pilots, while they are plausible enough, reduce the novel to a series of unintegrated episodes which are unified only by their common setting within the squadron.

Among the most interesting passages are those which recount the actual flying missions and the day-to-day activities in the operations of the squadron. Aleksich's own long experience in the F-102 equips him well to deal knowingly with the details of flying and ground training. And the experienced leadership of the group commander, Colonel Baugh, is evoked with a tone of respect for the problems faced and solved by this capable leader of men.

In summary, The Greatest of These achieves some success as a reasonably typical squadron history, even though it fails as a work of fiction. Aleksich is often awkward in handling dialogue, especially the intimate conversations of the many lovers in the book. His conversations too often become rhetorical set-pieces which have more in common with the stilted formality of medieval dialogue than with the tone and rhythm of modern verbal interplay. But the book is a mine of information about

the technical and social aspects of life in a fighter squadron in peacetime; it records both the trivialities and the tragedies of such a life. As an introduction for the young Air Force officer into the world of the jet fighter unit, the book has a genuine value; and as a sociological novel of Air Force life on a foreign base it records much that is worth keeping.

Similar in its subject matter to Master's Fandango Rock, Walter Sheldon's Tour of Duty (1959) concerns the problem of establishing and maintaining an Air Force base in a foreign country, in this case Japan. The basic conflict in the novel is between the aims and values of Paul Randock, an ex-Air Force pilot now a civilian public affairs officer on a fighter base in postwar Japan, and the military establishment, represented chiefly by Colonel Fargo, the aggressive fighter unit commander who commands the base, and by Lt Colonel Cowl, his conservative and rather priggish executive officer. Fargo had been Paul Randock's commander when both were flying combat in Korea, and he has persuaded Paul to give up his civilian advertising job in the U.S. and take the civil service position as Community Affairs Officer on the Japanese base. Randock is convinced that the Air Force should make greater attempts to establish contacts with and to understand the Japanese officials and the common people in the local community. Through his relationship with a well-educated Japanese girl, Randock has come to understand some of the cultural, political, and psychological barriers that cause misunderstandings and ill feelings. He attempts to get Colonel Fargo to make a few concessions, to negotiate some of the legitimate grievances of the local mayor and other Japanese against the American encroachments, but Lt Colonel Cowl is a cautious, sycophantic, do-it-by-regulations officer

who attempts to thwart Randock's efforts to persuade Fargo. Paul's efforts receive their greatest setback when at a club party one evening Fargo reveals his true feelings about Paul and his community affairs job:

> "Kid, you're just the way you always were, aren't you? A real idealist. Don't get me wrong, I'm not criticizing. We need the dreamers, too. But once in a while we just have to take a good hard look at the facts of life. Especially as regards your own little bailiwick here. . . .
> "Let's face it, kid . . . . We need the Office of Community Affairs about as bad as a boar needs teats." (78)

Paul is shocked and hurt, especially when Fargo confesses he offered Paul the job simply as a favor to an old friend:

> "You did good service to the government in wartime; you had it coming to you. Look at it this way. You deserve it more than most people . . . this way you've got security--they can't even fire you without an act of Congress, practically. So I thought you could use a little breather on Uncle Sam, that's all." (79)

Despite his disillusion, Paul determines to continue his efforts. It is, after all, his job now, and furthermore he is convinced even more of the need for understanding and frankness. The Americans isolate themselves from contact with the Japanese; "you could spend two or three years here--never leaving the base--and find all your wants taken care of, all your entertainments supplied." (70) Further, there <u>are</u> Japanese Communists who work skillfully to escalate every incident, every grievance, every supposed slight into a major anti-U.S. scandal. Paul realizes as much, but he makes little headway against base officials like Lt Colonel Cowl, who cynically tells Paul, "We've got to make it seem we're watching out for these little yellow bastards and protecting their interests, but we all know what the score actually is." (111) And even a hardworking, effective officer like Major Rossi, the Air Police Officer, advises Paul, "Don't try to clean up the town single-handed. Or even with help. Don't

upset everybody's day. Business goes on as usual, town or no town, at the airbase. We all like it that way, from the colonel on down." (85) When Paul argues against this proposition, Rossi continues, "Take me. I'm the last guy in the world who likes military discipline and all that crap. But I can make a lot more as a major in the Air Force than as a cop in Pacific City, which I used to be." (85) Against such self-interest, such mindless lethargy, Paul feels his task to be almost hopeless. But he persists.

The climactic event occurs when an aircraft on take-off hits a Japanese truck illegally crossing a controlled road across the runway. Paul has persuaded Fargo to open the road to local traffic. The accident kills both pilot and truck driver and maims several villagers into whose homes the disabled plane crashes. This incident is similar to the climactic crash in Master's Fandango Rock. Although Fargo, spurred by Paul, takes command and acts humanely in having his base personnel put out the house fires and tend the Japenese wounded, he afterward reacts by closing the road and putting most of the town off limits, a severe economic shock to the local population. Fargo then arbitrarily insists on going ahead with a controversial runway extension plan, which provokes a demonstration incited by the Communist element. Fargo acts bravely and effectively to quell the incipient violence at the runway site but later brutally assaults a drunken Japanese demonstrator who had managed to get into the dependent's housing area. The local news media play up the story, and Fargo is summoned to Tokyo for a consultation with General Leighton, Commander of U.S. Air Forces in Japan. It is apparent that Fargo's career is tarnished by the incidents at his base; he will not be promoted to general. Back at the base, Fargo admits to Paul his

shortsightedness and laments his inadequacy as a base commander:

> "Kid, where did I goof? I don't mean just here in Saruhashi--I mean where along the line? When I started out all I ever wanted to be was an airplane driver. I wanted to fly higher and faster and better than anybody ever flew before." (223)

He then tells a self-revealing story of how in his youth in Texas he heard the legend of how Indians ate the heart of animals they most admired to take on the character of the animal:

> "Anyway, I heard it and I got me a twenty-gauge and went out one day and shot a red-tailed hawk. They're a big bird . . . . I shot this big red-tail, and then I sat down, made a fire, cut its heart out, and roasted it and ate it. Can you imagine that?"
>
> "Yes," said Randock. "I can." (223)

Such are the ideals and values of Colonel Fargo. Paul Randock understands both Fargo's limitations and his valuable strengths. The values of his subordinate officers generally appear even more limited and less noble than his own. Conversely, Randock

> believed in what were generally called the Christian virtues, though he thought it rather fatuous of a good many Christians to claim a monopoly on them. He believed in love and kindness and decency, in an attitude of something other than sheer aggressiveness, in beauty and warmth and the absence of pain, in laughter and selflessness and sacrifice, and in--so help him--faith, hope and charity. (215-16)

Although the novel does not show Randock as a consistent practitioner of all of this impressive list of values, it is evident that he stands for ideas which Alfred Sheldon would have the reader see as opposite to the "military" virtues. The conflict is made explicit in the passage which continues Paul's meditation on his own ideals:

> The <u>feminine</u> virtues? Perhaps so. They were there to temper masculine strength. Yes--that was it. The inner force that spurred men to action was a terrible power, a moral atomic force, to be used sparingly and wisely, not to be made a way of life, for the more you used it the more it got out of hand. In the end it would destroy not your enemies, but yourself. (216)

This is the final message of the novel, and it is an indictment of the military ethic even while it tends to oversimplify that ethic and to posit the conflict in rather arbitrary terms. Tour of Duty is an interesting novel; its anti-Air Force bias is not strident nor violent. But the bias is there. Seldon creates in Col. Fargo a worthy antagonist, even while showing him as a wrong-headed one. Like Master's Fandango Rock, Tour of Duty illuminates many of the problems the Air Force faces in dealing with people upon whose communities its air bases impact so forcefully.

A much more virulent anti-Air Force novel is James D. Houston's Between Battles (1968). Set at Winchester, a USAF fighter base near Ipswich in England during the 1960's, the novel has as its narrator a very disaffected young reserve officer who is assigned to the base as Information Officer. A non-flyer, Lt. Sam Young is acutely conscious of what he conceives to be his second-class status in the fighter wing. He admits to "envying pilots the way I envied street fighters in high school," (4) but compensates by assuming an intellectual and moral superiority over them which sets the tone of the entire novel.

The novel is episodic, with little plot continuity. But the chief conflict, as in Sheldon's Tour of Duty, is clearly defined. Lt. Young and his enlisted assistant, Airman Martinovich, represent the harassed but persistent forces of intelligence and humanity opposed by the corrupt, or weak, or stupid, or venal establishment officers, chiefly Major Quigley (an overtone, perhaps, of the infamous Capt. Queeg in Herman Wouk's The Caine Mutiny) who is the Base Operations and Wing Executive Officer, and Col. Norman Mullins, the Base Commander. Both of these men are stereotypic of the arrogant but insecure, poorly

educated but powerful, military officer who appears so frequently as antagonist to the sensitive, morally upright, intelligent young reservist or enlisted man in such novels. The flavor of Houston's narrator is apparent in this introductory description of Mullins:

> Quigley waddled up the steps in time to meet at the door our commander, Colonel Normal Mullins, a small man with the handsome face not of a star but of a bit player who could always get work. On his right [sic] breast were six short rows of colored ribbons, on his left a set of pilot's wings with a circled star, on his shoulder silver eagles. (38)

Quigley is referred to as "hoglike" and Mullins as "a trim bantam," after which comes a passage of general comment about Air Force officers:

> Mullins was a Texan, which gave him just about the only edge he had on Quigley, who came from Oklahoma. All the colonels, it seemed, were from Texas, while lieutenant colonels and majors were from Oklahoma, New Mexico, or Arkansas. Captains generally came from the Midwest or Florida, and lieutenants of course could be from anywhere. There were no generals at our base but they usually hailed from Texas too. (38-39)

These passages are representative of the level of fairness and accuracy the novel achieves in its treatment of the Air Force.

Mullins has been a competent combat pilot but is totally ineffective and, like Colonel Fargo in Tour of Duty, completely out of his element in dealing with the problems of administering a complex air base. Maj. Quigley is a sycophantic, thoroughly unprincipled staff officer on whom the insecure Mullins relies for most administrative decisions. Base alerts are invariably exercises in pointless scurrying about; flying missions are dangerous but essentially useless exercises in making points for the commanding officers; public relations are exercises in covering up mistakes and blunting the effects of righteous protest; and social affairs are generated chiefly to curry favor with visiting dignitaries. Airman Martinovich, explaining to Lt. Young why he stays

in the Air Force, sums up a thematic refrain in the novel:

> "My theory is basically this: this outfit is unjust and corrupt, rotten to the core, because life itself is like that. Things are the same all over. Winchester happens to be my microcosm. And why do I stay in the service, wallowing in it? To keep my inside track, to collect evidence, to prove my theory correct." (95)

Even one of the pilots, Don Stillwell, is pictured as staying in the Air Force only because of a sort of reluctant addiction to flying and its association with gallant glamor:

> All the scarves and mugs and calfskin boots and traditional photos and record-breaking flights managed to keep each man believing he was somehow still a pilot of the old school, just having it better than ever in these supersonic planes. The commanders didn't want anyone bringing his image up to date, at least not *before* he was in too far to do much about it. They relied on those connections to the cockpit that went much deeper than duty or pride. (151)

The novel's crisis comes when Stillwell is severely wounded in a crash on take-off during a practice alert. Young and Martinovich extract him from the plane, but he is unconscious and dies later in the hospital. The alert had come at the peak of a base-sponsored dog show held in one of the hangars, to which many visiting British dignitaries had been invited as a public relations ploy to counter anti-American feeling. Stillwell's death prompts Young to request an early discharge, and Mullin, recently promoted to Brigadier General, expansively approves the request. Young decides to roam around Europe awhile, working when necessary as a newspaper writer or in a public relations job. "That sort of job was about the same, in or out of the service--you work for the men in power, you get them promoted, you lie a little and buy yourself some time and space." (221) He finally concludes that

> There was no getting away. Sooner or later, probably sooner, I would recross the Atlantic to the country that had spawned the grotesque and expensive fiasco inside Winchester's perimeter. (221)

The malaise, as Lt. Young--and presumably, James Houston--sees it, is a general one. The novel is not only anti-Air Force, it is anti-social. Houston never succeeds in getting above the whining, petulant, self-pitying tone and attitude of his narrator, which is a pity because some of the incidents in the novel have comic possibilities that, like those of Heller's Catch-22, could have been developed into fine satire. Instead, the novel is so petulantly insistent in its anti-establishment bias that it loses credibility with the unprejudiced reader. Even in small details, Houston is careless: officers wear ribbons on the right breast; command pilot's wings with their wreathed star are referred to as "senior pilot's wings"; Air Force generals wear "gold stars"; the classic acronym FIGMO becomes FUIGMO. In pressing its thesis, Between Battles depresses its potential effect and leaves the final impression of a book written to justify a private vendetta against the Air Force.

A much finer, more honest novel is James Ballard's The Long Way Through (1959), whose narrator, Bobbie Spear Williams, enlists in the Air Force, becomes a career airman, and comes to know both the rewards and the penalties of that commitment. Fundamentally, the novel asks the question "How does the Air Force--or the world for that matter--react when confronted with an honest man?" For Spear Williams is basically honest, often to the point of reductive simplicity, but he emerges as an admirable protagonist in a novel which explores the airman's point of view and the often seamy underside of the Air Force personnel pyramid with depth and understanding.

The opening and closing episodes of the novel are set in an Air Force prison where Williams is nearing completion of an 18-months sentence for being AWOL, then striking a guard while serving his original one-year

sentence. These episodes frame the book in a present time which allows Williams to recount in retrospect his life story, in much the same way that Salter in The Arm of Flesh uses an attempted GCA landing as a present-time frame for much of his retrospectively viewed story. But within the relatively small portion of The Long Way Through devoted to the stockade episodes, Spear Williams develops as a human being. He recounts how he had gradually achieved "the contentment," the resigned acceptance of being a prisoner:

> The stockade is the only place in the Air Force, in the military at all, where you can have real peace. I don't know why it is. Maybe it's just because things are finally out in the open, laid on the line, when you're in. It's not any more pretending then, about the rights and duties of soldiers, any more foolish talk about doing your job right, deterring the enemy, learning a trade. It's in the open then that the only question is who's got the billy stick, and so it's finally got to be an honest situation. (11)

While in the stockage, Spear Williams has met another airman, Frank Jordan, ex-prisoner of the Chinese in North Korea and also a long-term airman, whose example of courage and fortitude Williams has come to admire and whose companionship has helped him regain his own mental balance. Yet Williams is not willing to take any man's interpretations without question, even those of an admired friend like Jordan:

> Some people feel like the Army itself, the Air Force, is a jail. Jordan said once, The whole fucking world is a jail, Spear. I don't hold with him there at all. . . . And even if he is right, and it is one big prison, or a privy house or something--he remarked once it's that too--I venture to say some ways are better than other ones to write Kilroy was here on the wall of it. (15)

These homely words, recounted in the West Virginia hill dialect which Spear Williams brings from his native state, measure the stature of a man still seeking for a proper attitude toward his human condition, a man still capable of growth.

Williams's mother had died when he was an infant. He had lived until he was fourteen alone with his father, who taught him how to chop wood, hunt rabbits, and handle himself in the roughhewn but pleasant life of the hill-bound laborer. Among other things, his father taught him never to lie and never to allow others' opinions of him to affect his conduct. When his father was accidentally crushed to death by a rain-loosened boulder while chopping wood at the base of a cliff, Williams goes to live with his aunt and her family, who treat him like the outcast orphan he is. He quits high school at eighteen, having fallen behind his contemporaries in school work after taking much time out to work and play. He goes to Bluefield, gets a job as a truck loader, has his first sexual experience with a bar girl, quits his job because of a broken promise by his boss, then decides to enlist. He first tries the Marines, but the recruiter has filled his quota and suggests that he try the Air Force recruiter down the hall. He does, enlists, and finds himself in basic training at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas.

Williams makes an excellent record as a recruit. A quota-filling classification clerk persuades him to accept training in electronics, despite his lack of schooling:

> And he went on then to say how much the Air Force needed electronics men. Or as well as I could make out, he was. "I'll clue you in, Williams. All the opportunities for advancement in today's Air Force are swinging to electronics. As time goes on, it's going to be the outstanding field from every angle. It all adds up, see what I mean?"
>
> I couldn't entirely say I did. You probably had to be in the Air Force a good while before things like outstanding fields and swinging opportunities were clear to you. Before those expressions were, that is. They were not things exactly, that was just the kind of talking the people in charge there at Lackland had. (66-67)

At the technical training base in Mississippi, however, Williams does

well in early warning radar school, becomes a bay chief in barracks, and earns the respect even of the few "trouble-makers" who "did their barracks work not only better but quicker than the others did." (71) This is the first indication of a recurrent motif in the novel: the recalcitrants are likely to be the most energetic, independent, and worthy airmen in the Air Force. "It was those people that had the drive, the wanting, and the real McCoy feeling about things. And they were the ones the Sergeants and the officers got the maddest at and beared down on the most." (72)

After electronics school, Williams is sent to Stearman Air Force Base in Georgia, assigned to a control and warning radar squadron. Here he comes to know and love Air Force life. He is sent temporarily to an electronics factory in New Jersey, where he meets a mature young widow, Geneva Marshall, a secretary with the company. He meets a sympathetic master sergeant, Lamar Butler, a University of Virginia graduate who had been a captain navigator in World War II, but reentered the Air Force as a non-commissioned officer. His education, his courteous manners, and his technical competence as a supervisor all impress the airman, and Williams is sincerely grateful for the apparently selfless friendship of the older man, who he later realizes probably had a homosexual attraction to the honest and sexually naive young man. But there never is an attempt at overt homosexuality. Williams does excellent work and rises through the ranks to Staff Sergeant, a highly respected and valuable man in the radar maintenance field. This section of the novel gives a realistic and informative picture of barracks life and the technical work required of the airmen and NCO's on a typical base.

Williams meets a young girl who works in the Base Exchange, visits her at her home, and becomes engaged to marry. Selma Dee Mitchell is completely believable as a somewhat spoiled and sheltered, family-dominated, socially ambitious Southern girl who is friendly and honest in her affections but severely limited in her capacity for growth beyond the narrow confines of the social and ethical world of her lower-middle class background. A cousin of Master Sergeant Butler, she and her family see him as the epitome of the family's aristocratic pretensions and hopes. When he pins the blame on Williams for a truck accident in which he himself had been driving, Selma Dee cannot believe that her relative could have lied at Williams's court-martial and allowed her young husband to serve a two-months term in the stockage for offenses Butler himself was entirely responsible for. Her refusal to believe Williams and her offended sense of dignity at his becoming a prisoner serve to alienate the young couple beyond hope of reconciliation. After release from confinement Williams spends time with his erstwhile fellow prisoners, she abandons their home to return to her parents, and the marriage ends in divorce and bitter disillusionment.

As Williams experienced it, his court-martial had been an almost unbelievable exercise in irrelevance and pointless legal maneuverings. One of the few real weaknesses of the novel is Williams's refusal to insist, even to his defense counsel, that he had not been driving the truck when it was wrecked. His motives are uncertain, but Ballard leaves the strong impression that Williams unconsciously refused to destroy MSgt Butler's career just to salvage his own briefer one, even at the certain cost of a reduction in rank and a court-martial sentence. The trial itself is reminiscent of Meursault's trial in Camus's The Stranger.

Like Meursault, Spear William listens to the prosecuting and defense counsels argue, object, plead, and posture, but in all that is said for and against his case, he feels that some central core of himself is untouched. The arguments are maneuvers, like ploys in a poker game; the rules are set, the ritual is performed, and he is found guilty on three counts: drunk on duty (which he had been, partially at least), driving while drunk, and willful destruction of government property. He accepts the sentence without bitterness, but it is the first big step in a continuing process of disillusionment with the Air Force and its institutionalized impersonality in dealing with human beings:

> They could have their court-martial. Their procedures, their games, their mumbletypeg codes and articles. That was them. They could have court-martials six days a week and twice on Sunday, and what the facts were would keep on being the facts. And it was only so much of me, but what it was would keep on being that much. (214)

His relatively short time in the stockade bothers him much less than it bothers his embarrassed wife, who seldom even visits him there. He comes to respect the prisoners, the fellowship, and even the routine of stockade life.

> People in the stockade were with each other. Their squadron--or not theirs, since people in the stockade were not in squadrons any more--the outfits that had their names on rosters, they'd been rejected by those outfits. But the joke was on the outfits. Stockade people had been rejected all right, but it was into something much better than the squadrons had, something the squadrons went to a lot of trouble to claim they had when actually they didn't even know what it was. (226)

It was esprit, a sense of unit spirit and mutual confidence, born of shared hardships and shared feelings.

Once his marriage is dissolved, Williams becomes a recalcitrant himself. He drinks, carouses, races his car dangerously on the local highways, and accumulates a record of minor infractions which call upon

his head the wrath of the squadron commander. He still performs well his technical job, but he loses favor with his orderly room administrators. When he is refused a leave to visit Geneva Marshall, he goes AWOL and hitch-hikes to New Jersey. She welcomes him, and he settles down for about ten days with her and her young son in the Newark apartment. She tells him of her past, the death in an airplane crash of her Air Force husband, her years of loneliness since, her feelings about this new relationship with him. Because he comes to love her and believe in her, Williams feels he must return to his base and accept his punishment. He starts by train for Georgia, only to be picked up by the Air Police at a stopover in Washington and returned under custody as an AWOL airman. His squadron commander refuses to believe that Williams was returning voluntarily and accuses him of lying. It is the one accusation that for Williams is the ultimate insult, the one offense that he can never knowingly commit nor abide being accused of:

> "Sir . . . are you saying I'm lying?"
> . . . . . .
> "That's all, Williams. You're dismissed."
> "That's not all. I asked you. Is that what you're saying?"
> He smiled again. "Of course. Certainly you are. And now you got something else to say? If not, you're dismissed. That means you're to leave my office, Williams. Now. That is a direct order."
> We were looking at each other. After a minute, I spoke again. "Yeah. Yeah, I've got something else to say. Duck, you son of a bitch." And the ash tray slid across the top of his head and crashed into the wall behind him. He did duck, just in time, and the ash tray missed him and hit the wall. (319)

Williams is arrested and charged with desertion, d srespect towards a superior officer, assaulting an officer, failure to obey a direct order, and conduct unbecoming an airman. The desertion charge is reduced to AWOL, and of this he is convicted together with the other four charges. The sentence is one year. While in the base stockade, he assaults a

brutal guard, gets another year added to his sentence, and is sent to Camp Stafford, an Air Force prison near Sacramento. Geneva and her young son move to Sacramento to be near him, and she visits him weekly during his stay in prison. Before he leaves Georgia, however, the guards beat him brutally in retaliation for his assault on one of their members; and at Camp Stafford he spends two weeks in solitary confinement for talking back to the commander of the squadron of prisoners. Once released from this shattering ordeal, he is befriended by Frank Jordan, and the two become intimate confiding friends.

These stockade and prison episodes are excellently written. They evoke the boredom, the hard labor, the occasional brutality of prison life in a vivid and powerfully affecting manner.

When Williams has served eighteen months, he receives notice that he has inherited his father's small land holdings in West Virginia and that a mining company wants to buy the mineral rights to the land. He is called into the Camp Commander's office to sign the necessary papers, after which the remainder of hi sentence is remitted.

His conversations with Jordan reveal much of what these two men think of the Air Force. Jordan tells Williams the story of his enlistment during the Korean War and of his imprisonment in North Korea as a prisoner of war:

> This one, as he saw it, was only another tyranny, not as ugly as the one the Communists operated, but still a tyranny. The difference was only a matter of degree. The pattern, he said, was in 1984. I didn't know what he meant, but he explained that 1984 was a book, and it described how they had an inner party, and then the rank and file, and then the proles. And that was the arrangement in the Army. The Navy, the Air Force, any military outfit. Officers for the inner party, noncoms for the rank and file, and after that, all the rest. And I recollected myself then how the low-stripe enlisted men were usually called peons by the NCO's. And it was some general that said once that he didn't intend for the people in his

> command to be second-class citizens. Yet if the matter had got so bad that he was denying they were, it was pretty bad. (354)

Frank Jordan then tells of his resistance to his Chinese captors in the POW camp and of his later rebellion in Air Force stockades against the unjust treatment of prisoners. After hearing Jordan's stories, Williams muses:

> The Air Force ought to had tests of some kind, to use to spot people like Frank and keep them from enlisting. It ought to if it was going to go ahead being what it was, something to give a harmless livelihood for kids between high school and college, a peaceful island or reservation for older people that wanted to keep away from the stresses and conflicts in the real world outside. . . . With tests like that, practically everybody that joined up would be happy and contented. It wouldn't be much of an Air Force, but at least it would have a lot of satisfied people in it. (358)

This motif of the Air Force as a refuge, a place which rewards conformity and sycophancy rather than initiative and courage, pervades the book. It is a serious indictment, seriously presented not out of bitterness and petulance but out of what emerges as a genuine concern and belief in the potential of the Air Force. When he is released from prison, Spear Williams and Geneva decide not to return to his native West Virginia. Instead, he decides to re-enlist. He and Jordan had agreed during his imprisonment that the Air Force had become "the most expensive and razzle-dazzle and phoniest" of the services.

> They'd had a recruiting slogan once, "Only the Best," meaning it was only the best who enlisted in the Air Force and, just possibly, wanting to attract those people to join up. They'd dropped that one when they found out that the idea of security, not being the best or even being especially good, appealed to people more. Or appealed to more people, and then it was the ones that wanted security that were coming in. (364)

Now that he is out of prison, however, he cannot just turn his back on the service: ". . . what he could not forget was what the Air Force

could be. A setup of strength, and honor, and comradeship, and when the time came, defense for the republic." (365) Talking with Geneva about their future together shortly after his release from prison, Williams admits his realization that he has been at least partly to blame for the bad turn his Air Force career has taken. He sees himself and his past in a new perspective, one that enables him to understand, to forgive, to love with a true sense of selflessness. He realizes that "I cut myself off. I seceded, and that was a prison, that was the worst one of all." (378) So he decides to re-enlist:

> I was staying in because I believed *in* the Air Force. And a damn fool reason if I ever heard one. Man. . . . I knew what the Air Force was. All that Jordan had said about it, all I'd learned about it, was true. And even so. (377)

Even so, Williams stays. He has travelled The Long Way Through but has come to self-discovery, and in discovering himself he has reshaped the future of the world he will henceforth live in.

James Ballard has written a fine and often genuinely moving novel. Spear Williams, Frank Jordan, Selma Dee, Lamar Butler, and Geneva Marshall are characters who come fully and deeply alive in the book, and the evocation of the life and world of an honest, courageous, finally humane and loyal airman is as excellent as anything yet written about the Air Force. In an author's note which prefaces the novel, Ballard has written:

> In The United States Air Force there are some men, I know for a fact, who make it worth having, who make it, that is, the Air Force. These men will not have much time to be reading books, but if any of them should read this one, its author hopes it will be worth their time. Because, what they do is most of what is guaranteeing that books worth anybody's time can be written and read at all.

Ballard's dedication, like his book's narrator, reveals an attitude which makes even more gratifying the competent and honest book he has

authored. It ranks with the top few novels yet written about the U. S. Air Force.

A book that reads as though it were written to confirm Spear Williams's thesis that the Air Force *has* become a refuge for the incompetent and the self-serving seekers of security is Francis Pollini's Glover (1965). The book's protagonist, Airman Second Class Joe Glover, is a former high school football hero who gets expelled from college when the Dean finds him copulating with his Spanish teacher in her office one afternoon. Faced with the draft, Glover enlists in the Air Force, and the book relates his experiences as an Air Policeman at a USAF bomber base in England in the early 1960's. A picaresque rogue of the first order, Glover's chief objective in life is sex. He seduces almost every female, married or single, on the base--the orderly room secretary, the secretary in the education office, the Air Police office secretary, the hostess in the Airmen's Club, the new waitress in the snack bar--then branches out to London where he meets and beds, among others, an arty book and drama critic who is the wife of a local writer. Waking or sleeping, Glover's mind is filled with sex. Walking down a London street and seeing all the young women, his reaction is like Thomas Wolfe's when he first saw all the shelves of books in the Harvard library: he feels frustrated that he can never devour them all. Only an occasional memory of his football exploits or a fantasy of his future football career intrudes on his single-minded obsession with sex, and from his memories and fantasies evolves the portrait of a spoiled, arrogant, totally self-centered young man who has been allowed--even encouraged--to become what he is because of the willingness of everyone from his family and his coaches to the NCO's and the officers in the

Air Force to make of him a handsome, virile, all-conquering hero, the embodiment of their own grandiose dreams of athletic and sexual supremacy.

The first three-quarters of the book is a compendious recounting of Glover's sexual exploits, focused chiefly through his arrogant and thoroughly adolescent mind and related with an explicit vocabulary of four letter words which reproduce the crude power of his obsession with sex and violence. Even the squadron adjutant, Lt. Patton, a self-pitying, intellectually-oriented young esthete, has a strong homosexual attraction for Glover. Even though there is no physical consummation of this attraction, Patton does induce Glover to become a frequent visitor to his London flat and introduces him to his circle of sophisticated London friends. Glover promptly seduces one of them, the more-than-willing wife of his host at the first party he attends with Patton.

The crisis of the book comes when the young married snack bar waitress he has involved in an extra marital affair becomes pregnant, leaves her husband, and begs Glover to marry her. In a scene which reveals powerfully the aggressive destructiveness and the brutishness implicit in his sexual urges, Glover consciously attempts to induce an abortion by repeated sexual couplings with the at first acquiescent, then fully terrified young woman. When she struggles with him during the last of several violent sexual encounters, he stifles her attempts to scream and in doing so suffocates her.

When the British police arrest him for the murder, the entire base rallies behind him. Even Colonel Button, the Base Commander, visits him in his British jail cell, intercedes to get him the best civilian

defense lawyer, orders mess hall meals delivered daily to his cell, and later testifies for him in court. Lt. Patton and the lawyer concoct an alibi, and Patton falsely testifies that Glover was with him in London at the time of the murder. Almost no one on the USAF base, either British or American, refuses to give testimony in support of Glover's character, integrity, and model conduct as an outstanding airman. His cynically effective British lawyer succeeds in bringing forth an imposing array of defense witnesses, whose testimony is flagrantly dishonest as a depiction of Joe Glover's true nature, and in discrediting the prosecution witnesses at the trial. Glover is acquitted of the crime. Ironically, none of the officers or senior NCO's on the base ever addresses the question of his guilt. In one scene, a young lieutenant hesitantly raises this question at an Officer's Club luncheon with Colonel Button and many of his staff, only to be stifled by a blanket of silent reproach by everyone present: guilt is not the issue; the only aim is to win the case for "one of our own." As the book ends Glover visits a zoo with Lt. Patton in London. They observe the gorilla, Patton aware of its similarity to his companion and intrigued as usual with his own pseudo-intellectual perceptions, and Glover thinking of how it would be to floor the gorilla with a knockout punch. Leaving the zoo, they board a tourist boat where Glover resumes his concentration on a bevy of young school girls, one of whom he singles out as his next conquest. Nothing has changed: the willfully self-deluded will continue to prostrate themselves before the Glovers of the world; the naive as well as the sophisticated will continue to succumb willingly to the crude virility he embodies; and Glover himself will continue to ride roughshod over the ineffectual scruples of the few, secure and invulnerable in his legendary

apotheosis as the Great American Stud.

Pollini writes with a crude power. He succeeds in creating individual voices for his widely varied characters, from Colonel Button, Lt. Patton, and several base airmen and NCO's to the London esthetes and the British lawyers. Glover's thoughts and acts are narrated in a telegraphic style which accurately objectifies the crude simplicity of his mind; he dominates the book, setting the tone and instigating the major action throughout. He evokes early in the book a reaction of amused tolerance at his roguish charm and bland assertiveness; only with the murder and his amoral reaction to it does the sinister aspect of what he and his values represent dawn upon the reader.

Glover is thematically a bleak, despairing book. In it the Air Force becomes--as in Heller's Catch-22--a microcosm of American society and American values, an organization corrupt from top to bottom with a willingness to condone injustice, dishonesty, physical and moral sloth, and the most blatant variety of self-serving, image-making puffery. Chauvinism--racial, sexual, and national--abounds, and the few who protest or hold back are totally ineffectual in making any impact whatever on the prevailing walls of moral blindness and indifference. Not one honest and intelligently dedicated character appears in Pollini's debased Air Force world; the Joe Glovers are in the saddle and ride mankind. Where Ballard's The Long Way Through leaves an impression of the moral and social potential of the service, Pollini's Glover offers not one hope of improvement or redemption. It is as complete a story of self-serving corruption as has yet been written of the U.S. Air Force.

The novels by Ballard and Pollini present an intensely inside view of the Air Force; Reginald Arkell's The Miracle of Merriford, like

Glover, deals with the impact of the U.S. Air Force involvement in England, but Arkell concentrates on the impact of the American base on the life of a small provincial town, concentrating chiefly on the reactions and problems of the aging vicar of a small parish church when the giant bomber base occupies and expands a former World War II airfield near his village. The Vicar of Merriford is a gently eccentric Victorian, reminiscent of many of Dickens's characters, and the book is a whimsical, good-natured narrative of the very localized, non-cosmic aspects of international relations between Americans and British. The sleepy village is awakened by the arrival of the American engineer construction crew:

> First came the giant bulldozers, followed by fearful mechanical contrivances which dug valleys and dropped hills into them. Whole farms were laid as flat as the fens. Nothing was sacred. (42-43)

Roads are torn up and rerouted, hunting preserves are destroyed, noisy jet bombers and often noisier airmen disturb the peaceful village, and the inevitable local reaction sets in. Sensing the local feeling, the American base commander pays a visit to the Vicar, asking him to use his good offices in soothing ruffled feathers:

> The Reverend sat in his study and listened to the sad story of a great and friendly nation misunderstood by the very people it was trying to save.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "Perhaps they don't want to be rescued," suggested the Reverend. "They may not even know that they are sinking." (53)

The Base Commander makes little progress in convincing the old man that something must be done, but he does come to see that the problems are not to be easily solved.

In the whimsical world of this book, however, all problems are finally soluble. A happy liaison between Mary, the Vicar's young house-

keeper, and U.S. Airman Johnny Fedora develops an avenue for reconciliation. When an inspection reveals the supports of the parish church bells to be badly deteriorated, the Vicar is compelled to prohibit the traditional ringing of the bells until costly repairs can be made. Because his poor parish has no source of funds sufficient to pay for the repairs, the Vicar feels completely ineffectual. Airman Fedora, however, gets the base Public Information Officer involved in the problem, and a story is written up and sent to the United States, eventually to be published in a small Texas newspaper. An anonymous but rich "Daughter of Texas" donates $10,000, and at a big Thanksgiving Day celebration on the base the money is turned over to the Vicar while the entire base and local village population applaud the generous gesture. Ruffled feelings are smoothed; the Vicar is a hero to both his parishioners and his bishop; Mary and Johnny plan marriage and return with Johnny to America; the parish is set up not only with repaired church bells but with an unbelievably large endowment; and the Vicar is invited to spend his waning retirement years as a permanent guest on the Texas turkey farm Airman Fedora will establish after completing his Air Force enlistment. All ends well in this best of all possible worlds.

The Miracle of Merriford, published in England under the title Trumpets over Merriford, is a lightweight novel, episodic and almost devoid of plot. It is typical of the "local-color" fiction which skims the surface of human affairs and exploits pleasantly enough the cultural differences between the Americans and the English. The U.S. Air Force in it is a brash, inventive, generously self-righteous institution, disruptive only in ways which are portrayed as minor, and finally benevolent and beneficial in its influence on the community. Told almost

entirely from an English point of view, the story makes a few telling comments on American attitudes and assumptions, but the final effect is one of reconciliation, goodwill, and happy endings for all concerned. A minor work in a minor key, The Miracle of Merriford is light reading for a summer day.

Another unusual Air Force novel explores the seldom-fictionalized world of the chaplaincy. Herbert Tarr's The Conversion of Chaplain Cohen (1963) tells the story of a young rabbi who during his physical examination for commissioning insults the examining Army doctor and is disqualified for Army duty. Because the Rabbinical Group encourages rabbis with no previous military experience to serve a term in the chaplaincy, David Cohen is persuaded by the chairman of the Group to accept a commission in the Air Force, since the Army won't take him and the Navy has filled its quota for chaplains. Fearful of flying, he reluctantly accepts orders to the USAF Chaplain School and rides the train from New York to San Antonio and Landers Air Force Base where he finds himself one of the two Jewish trainees at the school. Here he comes in contact for the first time in his life with ministers of other religious faiths and dominations. Meeting his taciturn, blond, blue-eyed roommate for the first time, Cohen is sure he must be a German Lutheran, probably a Nazi sympathizer. Learning his first name is Albert only reenforces David's fears, but after a halting, tentative conversation David learns his roommate's full name. It is Albert Cohen; he is the other Jewish rabbi among the trainee group. Having similarly misjudged the religious affiliations of a Lutheran whom he thought to be a Catholic priest and of Catholic Dan Miller, whom he had mistakenly assumed to be the other rabbi, David Cohen learns early that his stereotypic

judgments need to be drastically revised in the wider world of the Air Force chaplaincy. Later the school officers insist that the two Jewish chaplains choose different roommates in order to promote closer relationships among differing faiths.

David's closest friend at the school turns out to be a Protestant minister named Roger Allerton. The two men share the usual comic vicissitudes of civilians being exposed for the first time to the military concern with such matters as customs and courtesies, military law, management, administration, supply, missions and functions of major commands, finance, and physical training, as well as some subjects, like "History of the Chaplaincy" and "The Chaplain's Place in the Air Force," peculiar to their religious specialty. Tarr deals with these matters in a manner predominantly comic, but there are serious episodes such as one in which David accompanies his friend, Roger, who is to preach as guest minister at a local church. Roger's sermon is violently anti-Semitic, concluding with an especially offensive passage:

> "And the wandering Jews are <u>still</u> with us, still <u>cursed</u> to wander the earth forever, like Cain before them, <u>still</u> serving as the living witnesses of the consequences of sin." (83)

David can hardly believe his ears. He leaves the church in distress and bitter chagrin that his friend could have said these words. Later, Roger apologizes; it was an old sermon he had given many times: "I guess I never really thought about it even when I wrote it." (88) Again, a vicious stereotypic prejudice has polluted a personal relationship. David reluctantly accepts Roger's anguished apology, but their relationship can never be quite the same.

The scenes set at the Chaplain's School are among the most effective in the book in showing the wide variety of men and viewpoints which

characterize the service chaplaincy. The most valued aspect of the school for the trainees--and for the reader--is the off-duty discussions among the various chaplains of their own religious beliefs, backgrounds, and reasons for becoming clergymen. Tarr is successful in writing these episodes so that they not only delineate fairly and believably the positions of the various faiths and denominations represented at the school, but also show the men themselves to be complex and various in their individual attitudes and interpretations, ranging from the narrowly self-righteous to the most tolerant and genuinely humble. The first third of the book is set chiefly at the school; these chapters provide an important foundation for the episodes which follow and which are much more closely focused on Chaplain Cohen in his often lonely functioning as a member of operational Air Force units.

Having graduated from Chaplain's School, David is assigned to an Air Force base in Mississippi where he finds a potential Jewish congregation of thirty, only ten of whom attend the Friday night Sabbath Eve services. His disappointment is somewhat assuaged when he meets a witty but rather fat and physically unattractive young Jewess, Dena Gordon, at the local synagogue. She is flattered by his attention to her and genuinely attracted to him, but her habit of using her wit largely to make self-abusing remarks about herself reveals her inner torment and insecurity. One evening she offers herself to David in a scene that achieves genuine poignancy, only to be turned--somewhat disappointingly--into a farce as David falls over a coffee table in her darkened living room, ending up with a bloody nose and with the solicitous concern of her father who is awakened by the crash. Dena covers her hurt feelings with a witty remark, but the incident preys on David's conscience, for he

realizes that he could hardly have brought himself to intimacy with her even if the accidental fall had not occurred.

One of David's congregation on the base is a young Negro airman, whom David takes with him as a guest to a Passover Seder at the downtown synagogue, a scandalous act of effrontery to the local Southern congregation. This faux pas culminates a series of others, such as calling a browbeating, partner-baiting officer's wife a "bitch" at an officers' club bridge party--she turns out to be the base commander's wife--and a refusal to kow-tow to the wishes of a sycophantic Jewish businessman more concerned with his local image than with any commitment to his religious heritage. The irate base commander puts David on orders to accompany the KC-97 Air Refueling Squadron on a 3-month temporary duty to Goose Bay, Labrador. Fortified with a copious supply of tranquilizers and anti-nausea pills, David flies north with the squadron, where he meets a beautiful but remote young Jewish salesgirl in the Base Exchange; she turns out to be a refugee from the anti-Jewish persecutions in Hungary during the World War II years. Ilona Lazarus gradually yields to David's obvious interest in her, but adamantly refuses to allow herself to become seriously involved emotionally after her profoundly dehumanizing experiences in Europe. He flies--reluctantly--with one of the planes on a refueling mission, gets to know the squadron crews, and becomes a confidante of Col. Kingsbury, the squadron commander. His feeling for Ilona deepens as they continue to spend as much time together as she will grant him and his duties permit. She reveals her past and her renunciation of belief in God--and in David's function as a rabbi. He flies back to his Mississippi base, leaving her behind.

Once back, his friendship with the squadron and with Col. Kingsbury

brings him an increased sense of belonging to the Air Force. He renews his friendship with Dena Gordon, but his feeling for Ilona persists strongly. When a KC-97 crashes and burns on take-off, Cohen visits the scene and later conducts the funeral of one of the officers killed in the crash. His sermon is an eloquent tribute to the dead pilot and to the sacrifices of the SAC men who fly, revealing the degree to which David Cohen himself has become committed to the Air Force and what it represents as a deterrent to world catastrophe. His sermon, coming as it does near the end of the novel, apparently reflects Tarr's own attitude toward the service; it is an attitude of respect and admiration both for the mission and for the men who execute it.

Cohen's final decision is to return to civilian life and a synagogue of his own in his native Brooklyn. At a base-sponsored surprise farewell party before he leaves, both Col. Kingsbury and the Christian Base Chaplain attend to pay tribute to his service. The party--and the book--ends with the surprise appearance of Ilona Lazarus, whom the Air Force has flown in from Labrador for a reunion and presumably a marriage with David Cohen:

> And then his friends were surrounding the two of them, pushing them together, smiling, laughing, joking, saying goodbye. And David--how could he bring himself to leave such beautiful people!--suddenly knew that the return trip to New York would be a far longer one than he had envisioned only two short years before. (341)

In The Conversion of Chaplain Cohen, Herbert Tarr recalls his own experience as a former Air Force Chaplain to write a book that illuminates humorously but often poignantly an aspect of Air Force life not commonly treated in fiction. His book, fundamentally sympathetic to the Air Force, explores both the goods and the ills of service life from the perspective of an independent, perceptive young clergyman. The book fulfills one of

the most time-honored traditions of literature: it entertains as it enlightens the reader with a series of episodes that typify the role of an Air Force chaplain.

Humor is the prevailing mood in another entertaining Air Force novel which also has a Jewish protagonist. Howeard Singer's Wake Me When It's Over (1959) is the story of a New York restaurant owner, Gustaf Deningzon, A World War II veteran who gets recalled to duty because of an administrative foul-up. At his wife's inistence, "Gusty" applies for GI insurance only to find that the complete record of his World War II service, including time as a German prisoner-of-war, has been lost. He signs an application showing only one day of military service simply to qualify for the insurance policy. Much to his chagrin, he later finds himself placed in a reserve category which makes him subject to recall to active duty for the Korean conflict. Despite his anguished protests and some ineffective advice from his lawyer, he decides it best to accept the recall rather than admit to signing a fraudulent application, hoping to secure an early release as soon as he can get a hearing from some responsible officer. As Gusty himself admits, he is a prize "schnook," a kind of person who is "a lot more hesitant and uncertain than non-schnooks." Schnooks are "sensitive, intelligent, and have a lot of imagination," while non-schnooks, or "Yulds," are "guys with no imagination . . . cocksure and definite about everything." (43) Admirals and generals, Gusty alleges, almost always are yulds:

> The thing about yulds is that torpedoes don't ever seem to hit them. You take the schnook who looks over the terrain and examines and is careful--he's the one who stumbles over his own shinbone and breaks his neck. The yuld dives off a bridge and somehow misses the rocks that logically should have split his head wide open; the schnook walks carefully into the water from the beach and steps on a clamshell and needs six stiches [sic] and spends a month on crutches. (44)

After initial processing at Camp Kilmer, Gusty is sent to Texas for basic training and classification. He meets an old World War II buddy, "Frozen Piss" O'Hara, now a senior NCO, who advises him to take radar school at Lowry AF Base so he will have a chance to be assigned as a GCA operator at one of the big airports near his home in New York City. Gusty agrees, still hoping to be able to convince some responsible officer that his being in the Air Force is all a big mistake. Once at Lowry, Gusty looks for "a friendly-looking colonel" to whom he can tell his story:

> But after awhile I found out.
> The Air Force has no smiling colonel. If a colonel starts to smile, some general immediately demotes him to major. But if he keeps snarling long enough, some congressman is sure to make him a general. (55)

He completes radar school and hopefully awaits his assignment orders. At the graduation ceremony, the orders are read aloud:

> Price, Frizzi, and Bowen got Westover Field, which is in Massachusetts. Those guys came from New Mexico.
> Randall, Cooving, and Jackner pulled Kelly, which is in San Antonio. All three are from Boston.
> Hennesy and Barnes got Mitchell, which is in New York. They come from Seattle.
> And what about me? I got Camp Stoneman, which is in San Francisco. Which, I realized in a second or two, is a Port of Embarkation. For Korea. (56)

Off he goes to Tokyo, where he gets assigned to Shima, a tiny island radar outpost between Japan and Korea. The small contingent of Air Force men on this desolate island is commanded by Captain Charley Stark, an ex-B-17 pilot whom Gusty flew with in World War II. Stark is sympathetic when Gusty tells his sad story and asks for help in getting released from active duty, but it seems that everyone on the island has already requested a hardship discharge, and higher headquarters simply files and forgets such requests. As one of the

sergeants says,

> "Asking for a transfer . . . is *like* asking for a loan at the bank. You can only get it if you can prove you don't need it. If the guys on this island were doing duty on Hawaii or Florida and were happier than a cootie in a gook's hair, they'd have no trouble getting out. But here, I guess you're stuck, Deningzon. You're here to stay." (78-79)

And stay Gusty does. Older than the other airmen of his own rank, he becomes friendly with Capt. Stark; Lt. "Doc" Farrington, the medical officer; and Sergeant Marrow, the top sergeant. He learns that morale on the island is very low, chiefly because *of* the lack of recreation and women to add interest to off-duty hours and because both Capt. Stark and Sgt. Marrow are too nice for the men to really blame for the situation. As Doc. Farrington explains,

> If you could tune in on the average GI's brain waves the lyrics would go something like this: "I'm going to be very careful and cautious so that I can live a little longer than that son of a bitch sergeant of mine, even if it's only half a day, just so I can have the satisfaction of pissing on his grave." (81)

But on Shima there is no one to hate, which makes morale worse than if Capt. Stark or Sgt. Marrow were real slave-drivers. The men do make frequent off-duty trips to "Penicillin Gulch," the local Japanese village on the island, to consort with the few well-used peasant girls there available. On one such excursion they persuade a reluctant "Pop" Deningzon to go along, chiefly because he will stay sober and drive the truck back to barracks. He goes, and while the party is in progress he waits in the truck. Having to relieve himself, he goes off into some bushes, which unfortunately turn out to be poison ivy. Gusty suffers as long as he can under the increasingly hostile insistence of his barracks mates that he report to Doc Farrington for the shot of penicillin to cure what they believe to be his very bad case of venereal

disease. Finally, his attempts at self-cure producing no results, he does go and Doc confirms to the men that his trouble really is poison ivy.

> Well, after that, I was promoted back to using the barracks latrine, and all the yulds were a little ashamed, because they started buddying up to me again, which I needed like a hole in the head. They even went back to calling me Pop. Good old Pop, the ex-lecher. (87-88)

Gusty frequently takes walks around the island, and on one of them he discovers a natural hot spring. This gives him an idea to establish on the island a cooperatively owned resort hotel, built and managed by the officers and airmen and catering chiefly to the armed forces personnel on rest-and-recreation leave from Korea. The remaining two-thirds of Wake Me When It's Over concerns the hilarious experiences the men encounter in secretly forming a corporation, hiring Japanese as front men to give the appearance of indigenous ownership, "buying" Japanese girls--as is the local custom--to serve as waitresses and chambermaids, building the hotel, and advertising the hot spring resort island as a tourist mecca. Doc Farrington manages to induce a nurse, Nora Merritt, to accept assignment to the island, and she agrees to help with decorations and with recruiting females to take their leave at the resort. Doc also attends a medical meeting in Japan at which he subtly tricks an egocentric medical writer into believing the hot spring to be a potent aphrodisiac. An article is published citing the "evidence" Farrington has planted, and suddenly word gets around of the magical properties of the water and of the availability of women on leave at the resort. The business booms, attracting not only run-of-the-mill officers and enlisted people but the high brass and even a stray visiting dignitary or two. Gusty's restaurant experience and his real genius for

organizing make him a hero to everybody on the island; money rolls in and is split equally among all the men assigned to the radar unit. Everyone works eagerly, and both the official mission and the hotel are run with enthusiastic efficiency.

Inevitably, however, problems arise. Gusty's wife sees a copy of the medical article which is picked up by the U.S. press, unfortunately with an accompanying picture showing Gusty in the background with his arm around one of the girls who had agreed to pose for publicity pictures when the hotel was first promoted. His wife irately visits a congressman and starts in motion what develops into a much-publicized full-scale congressional investigation of the illicit doings on Shima. As the heat of publicity puts pressure on the military, Gusty is arrested and court-martialed as the ringleader of the operation. "Hot-Spring Deningzon, the One-Man Vice Ring" is the label pinned onto Gusty by the U.S. press. Senator Drimmel, one of the investigators, attends the court-martial at which Gusty is represented by Doc Farrington as defense counsel. With the aid of some pictures showing the senator at a Japanese burlesque house in Tokyo, Farrington blackmails him into making a plea for Gusty as a prime example of free-enterprise business acumen and a red-blooded American competitor, resulting in a reduction in the charges against him. But Gusty is found guilty of misappropriation of government property--the surplus junk the men scrounged to go into the hotel project--and sentenced to eight years. By this time and because of the Senator's about face, Gusty has won many supporters of his initiative and morale-boosting efficiency. Even the local Japanese demonstrate in his behalf and threaten an international incident if the hotel is closed. The Commanding General is faced with the dilemma of what to do

about the court-martial sentence. Seeing his chance, Gusty asks for an interview with the general, tells the story of his recall, and convinces the general that the easiest way out is simply to declare him an illegal, ineligible airman and give him the administrative discharge he has sought for so long. Obviously, if he is not legally an airman the court-martial verdict is null and void. The general so orders, and Gusty is finally released from active duty. His farewell party is a monumental blast, after which Gusty flies home to New York and an apprehensive reunion with his wife, whose insistence on the additional insurance policy had started the whole affair. She is properly contrite about the trouble she has caused him:

> "You'll see, darling," she said. "You'll see. I'll change, honestly. You won't recognize me, I'll be the perfect wife, the absolutely nag-proof helpmeet. Forever and ever. I mean it, darling. Don't you believe I'll change?"
>
> I hugged her. I knew she meant it, but I felt older than the sphinx at that moment and much, much wiser. . . .
>
> "Sure, sweetheart," I said, patting her hair, "sure you'll change." Thinking all the while: But I won't hold my breath. (315)

Thus the book ends.

Wake Me When It's Over is a delightfully improbable but wildly funny book. It follows the formula pattern: the enlisted man and lower ranking officers are the good guys; the colonels and the generals are the bad guys--the "professionals," who tend to be regulation-bound, yuldish kill-joys. As Doc Farrington says about one colonel in the book:

> "Maybe he's a decent human being deep down, and I suppose there is some justification for most of the things he believes. He's a professional soldier. The service is his home, his community. and he wants to protect his neighbors--the officers. As for the enlisted men, I don't think he sees them clearly, he cannot identify with them because they're only in uniform temporarily.

> They're outsiders. Well, so am I, in spite of the fact that I'm an officer." (195-196)

But as serious as this message sounds, the book itself is not anti-Air Force. Capt. Stark is also a professional, and after his marriage to Lt. Nora Merrit they plan to stay in the Air Force. Singer has succeeded in establishing a tone of humor which captures often the flavor of comic anguish typical of so much contemporary Jewish writing. He allows Gusty Deningzon to tell his story in his own words complete with the wry shoulder-shrugging tone appropriate to this clever, humane, self-confessed "shnook" who really is an admirable and even a lovable character. The book's humor is essentially without bitterness--unlike much of the humor in Catch-22 or Glover--and the final impression of the book, as the title suggests, is of an improbable, almost dream-like interlude from the real problems of life in the Air Force.

Another off-beat novel, John Ball's Rescue Mission (1966), tells the melodramatic adventure story of two Civil Air Patrol pilots who fly a partially disabled Constellation aircraft from a hurricane-threatened Caribbean island to Homestead Air Force Base in Florida with a cargo of two severely-ill patients and a planeload of frightened islanders. Capt. Dick Sylvester and Lt. Peter Chang are single-engined, light plane CAP pilots with no experience whatever in multi-engine aircraft nor in instrument or night flying. Because of a fuel shortage that occurs while flying a search mission to look for Cuban fishermen afloat aboard a small raft, they land their small L-6 aircraft on the island of Tres Santos, only to find the airfield deserted. There is a civilian four-engine Constellation airliner parked on the field, and when the local people bring a badly burned young girl and a young man stricken with acute appendicitis to the field, the two pilots are pressured into

attempting to evacuate these people in the Connie. The local priest also insists that the plane take a full load of the islanders so that they can escape the dangers of the approaching hurricane. The book relates the harrowing efforts of the two pilots to get the aircraft started, taxied, and airborne, where they are spotted on radar and joined eventually by an Air Force plane with an experienced Constellation pilot on board. This mother plane guides them the rest of the way to Homestead, and Major Sam Aschenbrenner talks down the two frightened but courageous young pilots to a bumpy but safe night landing. They are met by a delegation of Air Force officers, including the lieutenant colonel in charge of the CAP unit they belong to and the civilian owners of the airliner they have commandeered. All is forgiven when the urgency of their flight becomes known; the patients and other passengers are cared for; and Capt. Sylvester and Lt. Chang are greeted as heroes.

Rescue Mission is a very simple story of adventure and suspense. It reflects the pride of the two CAP pilots in their Air Force affiliation and in the Air Force uniform they wear. John Ball does editorialize about the relatively meager attention and support the Air Force gives to its valuable CAP auxiliary, but on the whole the Air Force is pictured most favorably. Its officers are depicted as efficient and humane in organizing the escort aircraft and the reception for the beleagured Constellation, and the book ends on a happy if melodramatically unconvincing note of pride and heroism. It would make an attractive recruiting appeal for young men to join the Civil Air Patrol, and its portrait of the U. S. Air Force is exceptionally commendatory.

Among recent novels in which the Air Force plays a very minor part are two spy novels, Merle Miller's A Secret Understanding (1966) and

R.K.C. Ginn's Tyger! Tyger! (1968), both of which are set wholly outside the military establishment. In A Secret Understanding an ex-OSS undercover agent of World War II, now a magazine reporter, is assigned by his editor the job of tracking down the mysterious disappearance of Col. Brock MacDonald, an Air Force World War II hero who was shot down in Korea, captured by the Communists, forced to make anti-U.S. propaganda broadcasts from North Korea, repatriated after the armistice, and discharged from the Air Force. He mysteriously disappeared six months later. The reporter, Ward Matthews, discovers that MacDonald had withstood incredible torture, both physical and mental, before breaking down and agreeing to cooperate with the Communists. He also discovers MacDonald's dead body in a shallow grave near the house he had rented after his discharge from the Air Force, together with what appears to be a suicide note. It develops, however, that McDonald was a victim of a ring of spies, including his own uncle, who are intent on procuring U.S. atomic secrets. The story is incredibly complex and incredibly melodramatic, complete with sinister ex-Nazi strongmen and a hypnotized beauty whose susceptible memory is to be the repository of the secret formulae. The novel is of little literary and no thematic merit.

R.K.C. Ginn's Tyger! Tyger! is equally improbable. It involves a protagonist, Roger Widseth, a veteran of 22 years in the Air Force who is retired and taking graduate courses at UCLA. He is visited by two counter-intelligence corps agents who bring him news that he has been recalled to active duty as a lieutenant colonel for a special mission in Europe to track down a mysterious "Mr. K" who knows of the Russian involvement in the notorious Katyn Forest massacre during World War II. Widseth's travels take him, along with the usual beauteous and sexy female accomplice,

to East Berlin, England, and finally Morocco, where after incredible James Bondish adventures he finally locates Mr. K in a monastery where he has become a monkish recluse. Of course, Russian counter-intelligence agents are also in the chase, and the novel depicts all sorts of wild contests and maneuverings as Widseth outsmarts them. It is a poor novel with ridiculous situations, implausible characters, and platitudinous dialogue, far below the standards set for the spy-adventure story by such authors as Ian Fleming. R.K.C. Ginn was formerly an Air Force officer himself, but there is nothing whatever in Tyger! Tyger! about the Air Force except the identity of its implausible protagonist.

Chapter V

DOOMSDAY LOOMINGS

Beginning in the late 1950's and continuing into the 1960's, a series of novels was published purporting to show what the individual novelists believe might happen in our nation as a result of our possession of nuclear weapons, airborne strike forces capable of delivering the weapons, and military men in positions of such power that they are able to make or influence the decisions to use nuclear weapons and even to control the nation's political processes. Beginning with Forbidden Area and Red Alert and continuing in such novels as Fail-Safe; Dr. Strangelove, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb; Seven Days in May; Alas, Babylon; and The February Plan, the trend toward depicting the destructive capacity of the military--and especially the Air Force--as a dire threat to national survival gained momentum. Coupled with the subsequent nation-wide frustration at the protracted and seemingly unproductive involvement in Southeast Asia, these novels contributed to a growing national disaffection with the military which in 1972 persists with great strength. Two of these books, Fail Safe and Seven Days in May, achieved high places on national best-seller lists; both of these, together with Dr. Strangelove, were also produced as motion pictures which reached even larger audiences than the books. Most of these works have little literary merit, and none of them even attempts to depict realistically the day-to-day life of Air Force people. Instead, they portray apocalyptically the activities of Air Force officials

involved in political and operational affairs.

Pat Frank's Forbidden Area (1956) was among the earliest of these "doomsday" books. Actually a spy novel set after the "Indochina War," the book tells the story of a joint military-civilian group in the Pentagon called the "Enemy Intentions Group," whose task is to think and plan like the Russians and thus to thwart Russian attempts to spy on, subvert, sabotage, or attack the U. S. The protagonist in this rather diffuse novel is Major Jesse Price, a former World War II pilot who lost an eye in the Korean War and has been medically grounded. He had been a protege of General Thomas Keatton, the present USAF Chief of Staff, who got him his job with the counter-intelligence group:

> The relationship of General Keatton to Jesse Price was that of a father to a son--except that Price was only one of a hundred sons, each receiving, consequently, a tiny fraction of personal attention. Yet it was enough. It was a bond that held the devotees of the Air Force together, close as an Indian tribe that initiates its youth in pain and blood. (76)

The plot of the novel deals with the efforts of Price and his colleagues on the "Group" to ferret out the activities of a well-organized Russian spy ring who have planted one of their saboteurs in a wing of B-99 bombers crucial to the retaliatory capacity of the nation. Most of the action deals with the Russian spies and with the efforts of Price and his group to convince the President and the Joint Chiefs of the imminent danger caused by the sabotage of our bombers as a part of a Russian plan for a nuclear assault on the U. S. Only a small portion of the action takes place on Air Force installations, but the key role of Jesse Price and the importance of General Keatton do feature the predominant Air Force influence on national defense. Keatton's own view of his and the Air Force's mission is explicitly stated:

> It was Keatton's belief that the peace of the world, at that moment, rested with the B-99 . . . . Keatton had no illusions whatsoever concerning his own future in the event of war. Whatever happened, he was through. If the enemy strike succeeded, in all likelihood he would either die very quickly, or be executed later. If he was called upon to strike their cities first, his soul could not survive the trauma of being an instrument of death for twenty or thirty or fifty million human beings. . . . But if it did come, he would like to be certain that he could win it. For a protege of Hap Arnold and Tooey Spaatz, it was a professional matter. (48-49)

Largely because of the efforts of Price and his lovely female associate on the "Group" (novels like this one must have this routine bit of sex), the spies are discovered, the Russians' plan thwarted by a massive counterthreat, and everyone gets the end he deserves. Price of course marries the girl, gets promoted to colonel despite his physical disability,--"a pilot's eyesight would be of little importance, since pilots were obsolescent"--and settles down to a happy life with a rosy future. Competently written, the book is distinguished chiefly as one of the first of the books that started the "doomsday" trend.

Another of Pat Frank's books, Alas, Babylon (1959) continues the trend, this time showing the efforts of a small group of people in Florida to survive the effects of a mass nuclear attack on the U. S. There is minimal Air Force involvement in the book. The brother of the civilian protagonist, Randy Bragg, is Lt. Col. Mark Bragg, an Intelligence Officer in SAC who brings his family to Florida when it becomes apparent that a nuclear war is imminent. Mark expounds to Randy his belief in the need for more young, vigorous Air Force officers in positions of command:

> "Bold men, audacious men, tenacious men. Impatient, odd-ball men like Rickover pounding desks for his atomic sub. Ruthless

> men who will fire the deadheads and ass-kissers. Rude men who will tell the unimaginative, business-as-usual, seven-carbon sons of bitches to go take a jump at a galloping goose." (21)

Mark believes the country has atrophied in its timid military and political conservatism, especially in relying on jet bombers instead of spending more on research and development of advanced missiles. His fears are borne out by the ensuing war; he is killed when SAC headquarters is obliterated in the initial Russian attack, precipitated when an air-to-air missile, fired by a Navy pilot at a Russian jet, fails accidentally on a Russian naval base in Syria. The novel depicts the scene in the SAC War Room as the President authorizes the SAC commander to launch bombers and missiles when it becomes obvious that the Russian assault has been set in motion.

All this action takes place within the first third of the book. The remainder of the story concentrates on the aftermath of a nuclear war which effectively destroys both nations, and on the desperate efforts to survive and sustain civilized values in the postwar world in which America is reduced to a third-rate nation dependent on food from Asia and lend-lease aid from the countries of South America. A minor thematic element in the book is the need for innovative military leadership which might have provided sufficient deterrent force to have prevented the catastrophic war. But the main thrust of the theme is the will-to-survive which persists in the face of apparent hopelessness and the ultimate futility of all-out nuclear war. In this novel the Air Force fights a sinless, suicidal war, after which its sole function is to man the few planes and helicopters engaged in attempts to aid survivors and restore some vestige of civilization to a bankrupt and devastated nation.

The Air Force involvement is equally minor in The February Plan (1967) by James Hall Roberts (a pseudonym for a free-lance TV script writer). The protagonist of this story of CIA and military intrigue is Philip Corman, a former World War II officer, now an author, whose son, a lieutenant in the Air Force, has died reputedly by suicide. Corman suspects the official version of his son's death and goes to Japan to attempt to find the truth. After much discouragement by CIA and military officials, he uncovers a plot to launch a preemptive nuclear missile strike from Japan against the Red Chinese nuclear facilities at Langchow during a conference of the Chinese atomic scientists at the site. A key instigator in the plot turns out to be USAF Brigadier General G. V. Gibson. Corman remembers Gibson, whom he had known as a major in the occupation forces after World War II, as a "large, bearlike man who, despite great outbursts of profanity, was a true Victorian in the best sense of the word." (18) He is now commander of Wheeler AF Base in Japan and a virulent advocate of action to prevent the Chinese from developing a nuclear weapons delivery system. Gibson is a firm, outspoken believer in the domino theory. He is convinced that a preemptive strike is in the national interest, and he has found strong support for his ideas especially among men in the CIA who actually first propose the secret plan to launch such a strike. After much intrigue and personal danger, Corman finds that his son, learning of the plan, had attempted to assassinate General Gibson. He was captured and killed when he attempted to escape from a detention camp in Japan. In a melodramatic confrontation with General Gibson at the secret missile site, Corman shoots him and prevents the missile launch. To keep the plot a secret, the government publicly announces that General Gibson was killed

in an accident while performing his official duties. In a curious passage at the novel's end, Corman reveals to a government investigator his attitude toward the plot and the issues it involved:

> "The general was right. . . . Not in his projected attack on China--that was monstrous--but something he said. He accused me of acting on the same principle that motivated him. He said I was willing to suspend ethics, morality, to kill a hell of a lot of men, just to stop something I belived should be stopped. And that was true. . . . technically these men are traitors and they have to be killed--that's mandatory--but the law says that there is a procedure to be followed, a form. But if the law is observed, then international relations are upset. So you choose not to observe them. And to that extent you are just as guilty as the rest of us. All in the name of expediency." (312)

The investigator admits the truth of Corman's view but threatens to "deny everything and come up with convincing proof to counteract it" if Corman should attempt to publicize the true story. (313) The novel ends with Corman still tempted to reveal the story, but his future intentions are unresolved.

The February Plan is basically a cloak-and-dagger spy story of the doomsday variety. It is filled with deception, intrigue, and James Bondish adventures, and has an exceptionally low sex-quotient for a novel of this type. The central issue concerns the power of a few to subvert and undermine national policy, to provoke war in the name of patriotism. The Air Force general is sincere, even admirable in many of his qualities, but he is an extremely dangerous man. The novel is anti-military; it portrays professional officers as dedicated, sincere, but narrowly single-minded men who are unfit to exercise the power many of them are entrusted with. It is essentially similar to novels like Dr. Strangelove and Seven Days in May in its basic assumptions about the military service and the high ranking officers who control it.

When Peter Bryant George first published his novel Red Alert in 1958 few people, and probably not the author himself, could have foreseen the transformation which was to take place a few years later when his completely serious, totally humorless and non-satirical novel was rewritten by Stanley Kubrick, Terry Southern (better known as the author of Candy and The Magic Christian), and George himself into the script for the motion picture Dr. Strangelove. Adding to the bizarreness of the history of Red Alert was the publication in 1964--after the motion picture had achieved such notoriety--of a novelized version of the script, also written by Peter George under the title Dr. Strangelove: or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb.

Those who have seen the motion picture version or read the rewritten novel Dr. Strangelove would hardly recognize that the antecedent and the source of these works was the relatively obscure doomsday thriller Red Alert, which George published under the name Peter Bryant. The basic premise of Red Alert is similar to that of The February Plan. Brig. Gen. Quinten, Commander of a SAC bomber wing, unilaterally orders his planes to launch a preemptive nuclear attack on Russia, based on his conviction that such an attack is the bast way to avoid the widespread nuclear warfare that he believes inevitable once the Russians achieve an advantage in missile launch capability. The novel opens as the aircraft, flying what they believe to be a routine practice alert mission, approach the hold point on their courses to Russian targets. Peter Bryant discourses on the training and the attitudes of the SAC crews. They are intelligent, responsible men, well aware of the significance of their assigned mission and of the "hideous responsibility" of being "called on to destroy upwards of five million human beings at the press of a button":

> The SAC crews accepted these things as reality. They believed they guarded the peace of the world as surely as they knew the price they must pay within themselves to do it. If they had been ignorant, unintelligent men it would have been easier for them. But ignorant, unintelligent men could not have flown a jet bomber. The air crew were highly trained men of good educational background. They could think for themselves. The Air Force preferred it that way, even if it put a limit on the number of missions and years a SAC crew might be expected to operate efficiently. (11)

When the crew of Capt. Clint Brown receive the orders to proceed to their Russian target and to bomb it, they are at first skeptical. But after all the possible verification procedures convince them the order is clear, unambiguous, and apparently legal, they determine to carry it out, though with the direst private misgivings and regrets. And on the issuing end of the order, Gen. Quinten is portrayed as a rational, level-headed man who has been an excellent commander. "The men under him liked him personally, respected his judgment, and obeyed him implicitly." (41) He is aware of Russian war plans, of their rapid build-up of ICBM forces, and of what he believes to be their certain intention to launch a surprise attack on the US:

> He considered there was only [one] way to defeat it, and that was to beat the Russians to the punch, and catch them with their guard down. It was his belief that the 843rd Wing on its own could destroy the Russian capacity to wage a global war. It was not a wild belief, but the carefully considered conclusion of a man with a lifetime's experience of bomber operations. (40)

He has completely "lost faith in the higher echelons. He did not blame the generals above him so much as the statesmen above them," and he believes many of the generals themselves are not only frustrated, but that if they had his option they might well exercise it just as he intends to do. Therefore, he seals off his base and orders his aircraft to attack--and they do.

Once it becomes apparent that recall of the bombers is impossible, the Joint Chiefs of Staff advise the President to follow up with an all-out attack, certain that the Russians will launch a retaliatory attack to the limit of their own capability. The President refuses and summons the Russian ambassador to join him in the Pentagon War Room for hot-line negotiations directly with the Russian premier and his military staff in Moscow. He knows the Russians have built and buried in the Ural mountains at least twenty nuclear devices which if exploded would render the earth uninhabitable because of radioactivity. He is convinced that rather than accept defeat and the destruction of Russia, the Russian leaders would set off these devices. The tense negotiations result in an agreement that if any U. S. bombers do succeed in reaching their target and bombing it, despite all that both Russian and U. S. air defenses can do to turn them back or destroy them, the Russians will be permitted to bomb a U. S. city of comparable size in retaliation.

Meanwhile, an infantry assault has been mounted against Gen. Quinten's base, and when it is apparent that his base defenses will be overrun, he commits suicide. His executive officer, Major Howard, who has attempted to persuade Quinten to call back his bomber wing, succeeds only after Quinten's death in deducing the proper recall code sign. This discovery enables the President to recall the bombers, all but one,which has had its radio destroyed by a missile attack. This lone crew heroically attempts to reach its target despite damage to the aircraft, dead and injured crew members, and persistent Russian attacks. At low level the plane makes a suicidal attempt to release its H-bomb, the bomb fails to release properly, and the plane crashes far enough away from its target that the relatively small atomic trigger explosion

which results does no damage to the ICBM base or to the nearby city. The Russian retaliatory attack is forestalled, and both the President and the Russian ambassador agree that everything possible must be done to prevent such an accident in the future. They resolve that "no-one, on either side, could live through a time like that and ever again seek war." (191)

This obviously melodramatic novel contains not a hint of comedy or satire. The people involved are treated by the author as rational, if often misguided and narrow-minded men, whose motives are neither self-seeking nor incredible. Even Brigadier General Quinten, who orders the attack, is portrayed as more nearly a martyr for his beliefs than as an irresponsibly mad warmonger. The tone of the novel is one of respect for if not of acquiescence in the general's motives and decision, and the outcome, even though it narrowly averts disaster, is portrayed as increasing the chances for accommodation and peaceful negotiation between the U. S. and Russia. The author is a British citizen and former Royal Air Force flyer; he inadvertently reveals his background in several details of his novel, such as using the British spelling "defence" and referring to the aircraft parking area as the "tarmac." Red Alert is notable chiefly in terms of its influence on its more highly publicized successors, Dr. Strangelove and Knebel and Bailey's Fail-Safe.

The rewriting of Red Alert into the screenplay for the motion picture Dr. Strangelove: or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb transformed this completely serious novel into a wildly improbable but hard-hitting satire. After the commercial success of the film, Peter Bryant George published a novel bearing the same title as the motion picture and based upon the screenplay which he had worked on

together with Terry Southern and Stanley Kubrick, the director of the film. This publication completed a cycle which transformed George's Red Alert (1958) into a screenplay which in turn became the basis for the satirical novel, Dr. Strangelove (1963). In plot Dr. Strangelove follows generally the sequence of action established in Red Alert. A SAC general takes it upon himself to send his planes to attack Russia; the Joint Chiefs and the President try frantically to recall the planes; they summon the Russian ambassador to the Pentagon War Room for hot-line consultations with the Russian Premier; one U. S. plane gets through despite the U. S. and Russian attempts to stop the attack. But in Dr. Strangelove, the aircraft successfully launches its bomb and sets off a worldwide nuclear holocaust at the prospect of which the generals and politicians, including the Russian ambassador, cynically set about planning how a few of the elite can survive underground and begin to breed a new generation to repeople the devasted earth. An "Introduction" to the novel purports that the manuscript of the novel is being published by intelligent beings on another planet at some unspecified date far in the future after civilization on the earth itself has been destroyed.

Except for the general outline of the plot, however, Dr. Strangelove bears little resemblance to Red Alert. The cast of characters in Red Alert becomes a cast of caricatures in Dr. Strangelove. Brig. Gen. Quentin becomes General Jack D. Ripper, a fanatic, arrogant, narrow-minded, bigoted martinet who worries about the Communist plot to pollute American's "precious bodily fluids" by advocating the flouridation of water; he drinks only grain alcohol and rain water. Ripper's bland arrogance is a mask for his total insecurity and insane superstitions, revealed when he confides his problems to his RAF Exchange

Officer assistant, Group Capt. Mandrake, whose prototype in Red Alert was Major Howard. Other characters from Red Alert are similarly caricatured: Capt. Brown, the agonized but heroically dedicated aircraft commander, becomes Major "King" Hong, a wildly-funny Texan whose main objective in life has been to see "Combat!" and who is ecstatic at the chance to drop his bombs on Russia. General Steele, the USAF Chief of Staff, becomes General "Buck" Turgidson, who when called from bedding with his secretary to the urgent Pentagon meeting leaves her with this farewell:

> "Tell you what you do. Look, you start your count down right now and old Buckie will be back here before you can say re-entry." (25)

He also allows that, in sending the planes against Russia, "General Ripper kind of exceeded his authority," (35) but that "I don't think it is fair to condemn a whole program for a single slip-up." (38) The President, unnamed in Red Alert, becomes the harried Merkin Muffley in Dr. Strangelove; Ambassador Zorubin is rechristened de Sadeski; the unnamed Russian Premier becomes Premier Kissof; the U. S. Infantry Officer who successfully attacks the SAC base from which the planes were launched is named Col. "Bat" Guano; and Dr. Strangelove himself, who has no antecedent whatever in Red Alert, is depicted as a crippled ex-Nazi rocket scientist whose deformed rightarm spontaneously attempts to render the Nazi salute whenever he is excited.

The novel, like the film, is often wildly funny, but the underlying seriousness of its satire on generals and politicians is bitter and unrelenting. It holds up to ridicule not only the command and operational echelons of the Air Force but the scientists and politicians

who exercise the greatest influence on national defense policy and who are ultimately responsible for developing weapons systems which the novel shows to be the inevitable agents for destroying civilization on earth. Except for Group Captain Mandrake, the Royal Air Force executive officer, every important military officer portrayed in the novel is a bigoted, bloodthirsty man who finds stimulation and satisfaction in planning and fighting wars. The situations and the dialogue are often farcical, and the novel attacks with blunt, outraged, sledge-hammering satire the whole concept of nuclear warfare. It takes the basic assumption of Red Alert--that a single misguided officer has the power to precipitate world-wide nuclear devastation--and attempts, through comic exaggeration and ruthless ridicule, to show both the feasibility and the likelihood of such an outcome. Implicitly, the novel condemns the Air Force and the men who control it as suicidal advocates--and victims--of an insane, bizarre, and inhumanly monstrous concept of national security. Like the film, the novel is violently anti-military and anti-war. It offers no real alternative to continued nuclear confrontation between the US and Russia; indeed, its epilogue merely confirms the pessimistic bias which underlies the novel's humor:

> Though the little-known planet Earth, remotely situated in another galaxy, is admittedly of mere academic interest to us today, we have presented this quaint comedy of galactic pre-history as another in our series, The Dead Worlds of Antiquity. (145)

Man at last does destroy himself; his brief history on earth becomes only a quaint prehistoric footnote to presumably intelligent future beings on other worlds; and the U. S. Air Force plays its crucial, sinister role in the cosmic tragedy. Such is the final statement of the book.

It is a statement which may be overlooked by those who view the film or read the novel simply as a comic spoof, but there can be little doubt that these words are seriously intended and that their intentions are to expose what the authors conceive to be the ominous power and the ultimate stupidity of our military and civilian leadership.

Another doomsday novel, similar in plot to Red Alert and Dr. Strangelove but achieving greater notoriety than either, is Fail-Safe (1962) by Eugene Burdick and Harvey Wheeler, a Book-of-the-Month Club selection that remained on the national best-seller list for 30 consecutive weeks during late 1962 and 1963. Edited installments of the novel were published in The Saturday Evening Post (13, 20, and 27 October 1962). Fail-Safe purports to be a fictional treatment of how the malfunction of an electronic device in SAC headquarters causes a flight of six bombers to receive a coded signal to proceed beyond their assigned holding points and launch an attack on Russia. "The events . . . are thought of as taking place in 1967," (7) and the authors assert that there have actually been mistakes and near disasters because of SAC commanders who were uncertain about unidentified objects on their radar screens:

> Thus the element in our story which seems most fictional--the story's central problem and its solution--is in fact the most real part. Men, machines, and mathematics being what they are, this is, unfortunately, a "true" story. The accident may not occur in the way we describe but the laws of probability assure us that ultimately it will occur. The logic of politics tells us that when it does, the only way out will be a choice of disasters. (8)

The "choice of disasters" in Fail-Safe is the President's agonizing decision to drop nuclear bombs on New York City in retaliation for

the accidental bombing of Moscow by the lone U. S. aircraft which because of radio interference cannot be recalled and completes its attack mission against the Russian capital. The events and many of the characters are essentially similar to those in Red Alert, but in Fail-Safe the ranking Air Force officers--General Bogan, commander of SAC, and Brigadier General Black, a personal friend of the President--are portrayed in generally sympathetic terms. It is the plan itself, pictured as relying too confidently on the correct functioning of electronic machines, which is deficient, and when an electronic machine fails man becomes helpless to halt the inexorable execution of the attack plan. Men, in effect, become victims of their machines; even with good will and desperate effort they find themselves unable to halt processes they themselves have devised. Russian Premier Khrushchev is depicted as telling the U. S. President (a character apparently modelled on President Kennedy), "We became prisoners of our machines, our suspicions and our belief in logic." (279)

The nearest thing to a human villain in Fail-Safe is a German Jewish political scientist, Dr. Walter Groteschele, who may have been the prototype for Dr. Strangelove. He is the 15 year old son of an immigrant family who came to the U. S. after persecution in Germany. He learns early that politics is the avenue to power and succeeds in calling attention to himself as a young scholar whose doctoral thesis attacked the idea that the U. S. should not--or would not--start a nuclear war. He is invited to participate in national security deliberations and establishes himself as a defense advisor to three national administrations. He is a ruthless, effective plotter and is disappointed when full scale nuclear war is averted by the agreement that we will

drop a retaliatory bomb on New York City. Opposing Groteschele is Brigadier General Black, the USAF officer whose ethical sensitivity and intelligence make him the moral center of the novel. Black sees the great danger in nuclear confrontation with Russia and shares the concern that some unforeseen accident may precipitate war. His awareness of the ethical implications of the nuclear build-up causes him to see the developing situation in tragic perspective, and his personal tragedy comes when he is ordered personally to obliterate New York City--where his family and the President's wife are located. After completing his bomb-drop, he commits suicide by poison, and the President awards him posthumously the Congressional Medal of Honor.

The SAC Commander General Bogan, like Black a career Air Force professional, is also depicted in generally sympathetic terms. He is of a Tennessee family long associated with the military, as his full name Grant Lee Bogan would suggest. Less sensitively intelligent than Black, he is shown to accept more unreservedly the military ethic of obedience and loyalty to his superiors. When a New York congressman urges him to mutiny against the President's order to bomb New York City, Bogan refuses and insists on his duty to obey. Among the military characters, including the bomber crew who attack Moscow, only Colonel Cascio, a deputy to General Bogan in the SAC war room, is depicted as a firm advocate of preventive war. Cascio attempts to prevent both U. S. and Russian attempts to stop the bombers once they have proceeded beyond their "fail-safe" points, but his attempt is successfully overpowered by the threat of force by air policemen who guard the SAC war room. (In the serialized version in The Saturday Evening Post he goes berserk, assaults General Bogan, and is physically overpowered, ranting and screaming).

Those who see the motion picture or who read only the shortened serialized version of Fail-Safe will miss the fleshing out of both plot and characters in the full-length novel. Although equally melodramatic in its basic treatment of events, the novel does tend to engage the reader's interest in the major characters, especially Brigadier General Black, and to suggest the complex interrelationships among politicians, scientists, manufacturers, and the military establishment. It is fundamentally a political novel, concerned with the wisdom of the U. S. defense policy in its assumptions about the deterrent effect and the dangers of nuclear weapons systems. In it the military are not, as in Dr. Strangelove, narrow-minded, belligerent war-mongers. As a group they are pictured as intelligent men of varying degrees of ethical awareness but fundamentally dedicated to executing the policies and obeying the orders of their civilian superiors. The sole sinister military figure, Col. Cascio, is shown to be outnumbered and outranked by cooler heads, and his presence in the service is shown as more of a potential than an actual destructive element. The similarity of Fail-Safe to both the film and novel versions of the subsequently published Dr. Strangelove provoked a public argument in which the issue of plagiarism was heatedly discussed (see, for example, "The Politics of Science Fiction" in the British magazine Encounter, May, 1963), but Fail-Safe, like its predecessor Red Alert, is wholly serious in its tone and its treatment of issues and characters. Inaccurate in many of its technical details, it perhaps willfully deceived a large proportion of its readers about the effectiveness of the Strategic Air Command's positive control measures and about the true processes by which an attacking force could be launched against an enemy country. But its emphasis as a novel,

intelligently read and interpreted, is not finally on the problem of specific mechanical details so much as upon a critique of the wisdom of any policy which offers the nations involved only a "choice of disasters." The conflict of the novel is fundamentally between the values of General Black versus those of Dr. Groteschele; SAC, its plans, planes, and men, are not the villains but only the reluctant means to destructive ends which can be countered only if men of good will can sense and act to avert the destructive influences that spring from their own suspicious and combative natures, only if they can and will control the way their destructive machines are devised to operate. The novel offers little hope that such a resolution of man's differences is likely to emerge, although Khrushchev does offer to come to the U. S. to begin disarmament negotiations; rather, it ends on a note of pious but hardly prophetic hope that the tragic awareness of one actual mistake will prepare the will and the means to avoid even greater potential mistakes. If there is prophecy in the novel, its message is that, given the world as it is and its weapons poised as they are, doomsday indeed looms over mankind.

Even more political in its thematic concerns is Seven Days in May (1962), by Fletcher Knebel and Charles W. Bailey, II. The events of the novel occur in May of 1974, a date which current readers will feel to be either more or less portentous depending upon their political views and their perspective on present trends. An epigraph to the novel quotes President Eisenhower's famous speech in January, 1961, citing the need to "guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex," a warning which the novel portrays as fulfilled prophecy.

The book deals with an attempt by a small group of ranking military

officers, backed by a coterie of arch-conservative politicians and newsmen, to depose Democratic President Lyman Jordan and install as President the popular General James M. Scott, the Air Force Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. President Jordan has concluded an unpopular disarmament treaty with Russia, and his popularity has reached an all-time low as measured by national polls. The country is pictured as badly divided and disaffected; people feel incapable of influencing the policies and decisions which affect them; constant dissent has destroyed nearly all feeling of national unity; and "people have seriously started looking for a superman." (119) Gen. Scott appears to be the only national figure prominent and popular enough to project the superman image, and even President Jordan admits that conditions are ripe for drastic change:

> "The climate for democracy in this country is the worst it's ever been. Maybe General Scott thinks he holds salvation in his hands. If he does, he's pitifully mistaken, and I feel sorry for him." (119)

The coup is first brought to light by Marine Colonel "Jiggs" Casey, one of the staff assistants to Gen. Scott, who becomes curious when he learns of the existence of a super-secret "communications" unit which has been set up by Scott, using funds not subject to the usual auditing and appropriations procedures. Casey's curiosity is further provoked when he discovers a late-night meeting of Gen. Scott with Senator Prentice, a Democrat himself but an arch-foe of the President, at Scott's quarters. Casey, taking a great risk for himself and his career, reports his knowledge directly to the President, who questions him severely regarding his motives and points out the seriousness of his accusations. In this conversation, the President says,

> "You know . . . I can never get over the caliber of the service academy graduates. The officer corps, the professionals, have been good to the nation. And they've been good for it. The country has believed that--look at the rewards military men have been given, even this office I happen to hold right now. There's been a real feeling of trust between our military and civilians, and damned few countries can say that. I think it's one of our great strengths." (69)

Scott is a graduate of the Military Academy, and like Gen. MacArthur and Gen. Eisenhower has attracted a national constituency many of whom want to transfer their hero's potential power into the political arena. Scott has handled himself exceptionally well in his many appearances before congressional committees. On one of these occasions, he commented on his own feelings about the nation:

> "It never occurred to me really, until I entered the Military Academy, that I was the beneficiary, along with all citizens, of a really unique system of government.
>
> I came to the Point in 1934. . . . It did not take long for the Academy to make quite clear to me the virtues of our form of government and the differences between the American and other societies.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> I must say, speaking now on a completely personal basis, and not in my official capacity, that I have been disturbed, over a period of years, at indications that Americans do not always recognize the full dimensions of the threats to them and to this . . . marvelous system under which we live.
>
> I think that an examination of the period of the late forties, of 1955, of 1959, of early 1961, and of more recent years would indicate at least the shadow of a recurring pattern, a pattern of what might be called 'complacency' or 'wishful thinking.'" (102-03)

(It is curious to note of this passage, written in 1962, how easy it would be in 1972 to add additional years of crisis, but how <u>unprophetic</u> the accusation of "complacency" has turned out to be.) But within the context of the novel, Scott's words reveal him to be the kind of man who feels the need for some sort of national crusade, some movement which can restore national pride and a sense of national purpose. He is

joined in this feeling by Senator Prentice and other influential politicians and by many high-ranking officers who align themselves with the attempted coup: Gen. Hardesty, USAF Chief of Staff; Gen. Dieffenbach, Army Chief of Staff; Gen. Riley, Commandant of the Marine Corps; Gen. Daniel, Commander of SAC; Admiral Wilson, Commander of the Pacific Fleet; Lt. Gen. Hastings, Commander of the Army Airborne Corps; and Gen. Seeger, Commander of Vandenburg AF Base. It is noteworthy that, although all the services have high ranking officers who support the coup attempt, the Air Force is depicted as having the largest number of disloyal generals.

Because of Col. Casey's courageous and forthright act in reporting his suspicion, President Jordan is able to rally a small group of trusted civilian friends in his administration and in Congress. They set about finding out the sources and the details of the coup attempt, which is planned to occur during a practice alert when President Jordan is to be detained and Scott installed as President. Adroitly these loyal men, including Col. Casey, act to forestall the coup, and their individual and collective efforts make up the major action of the novel. President Jordan is depicted as a humane, liberal, basically astute politician who in the crisis acts resolutely and wisely in organizing and directing his meager forces to forestall the coup. He forces the defeated General Scott to resign, together with the Chiefs of the Army and the Marines. Only Admiral Palmer, the Navy Chief who refused to join the coup attempt, survives to become the new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. President Jordan, in making his public announcement, plays down the true extent of the attempt and makes no mention of the intent to depose himself and install Scott as President. Instead, he defines the

key issue as being the disaffection of these officers with the disarmament treaty and with his visit to Vienna to discuss the treaty with the Russian premier. He is gracious and lenient in his public remarks concerning their involvement. The new Air Force Chief is General Rutkowski, former commander of North American Air Defense Command, who had supported the President during the developing crisis. Among the few other loyal Air Force officers is Colonel O'Malley, an Air Force Academy graduate who is an operations officer at the Cheyenne Mountain underground control center under General Rutkowski's command:

> Rutkowski liked this trim young officer. The earliest graduates of the Air Force Academy were beginning to come into responsible positions now, and Rutkowski rated them, on the average, as far superior to his own age group which had schooled at West Point and then transferred to aircraft. These youngsters, he thought, were all Air Force. They had it drilled into them as shaven-headed "Doolies," or first-year men, at the Academy, where no effort was spared to weed out those who might later decide to give up a military career. They were run, shouted at, and worked until instant obedience was instinctive and the hunger for responsibility, for a chance to prove themselves, was ravenous. They were bright and smart and they loved the service. Rutkowski could ask no more of an Air Force man. (260-61)

In his speech to the nation, President Jordan praises General Scott's past services to the nation and comments on his own action in dismissing him:

> "It was not the opposition of General Scott and his colleagues which required their resignations. It was the timing of that opposition. Until the Senate ratified the treaty, they had every right--indeed a duty--to speak their views frankly and fully. But once the Senate voted, making the treaty an established national policy of the United States, they were then duty-bound to render it every support within their power as long as they remained on active duty. That they refused to do; and that refusal no President could countenance." (331-32)

Thus, the issue is publicly defined in much the same way that President Truman defined his position in dismissing General MacArthur during the Korean War. But the reader of Seven Days in May knows that President Jordan in his public statements simply does not reveal the insidious, revolutionary, totally unconstitutional, and disloyal actions of General Scott and his military and civilian co-plotters. The novel thus sets up a situation of dramatic irony: in having the President publicly praise Scott and the tradition of the service academies and professional officers, the novel invites the naive reader to accept the praise at face value while offering the sophisticated reader a vivid perception of the undercutting irony. Knebel and Bailey do take care to show both loyal and disloyal officers from each military service, but it was certainly their conscious choice to create as the prime mover of the plot an Air Force general and to depict a wide spectrum of high ranking Air Force officers as fully supporting Scott's seditious efforts. The novel leaves the final impression that such an attempt very nearly succeeded, that it could and may happen again, and that most if not all ranking professional officers would, if what they conceive to be vital issues were at stake, actively support the overthrow of civilian control and establish one of their number as head of the nation. The implications are obviously intended to introduce doubts about the ultimate loyalty of our military leadership and especially of the chief Air Force commanders.

Seven Days in May achieved even greater popularity than Fail-Safe and Dr. Strangelove. Not only was it made into a commercially successful motion picture, but it maintained a place on the national best-seller list for a period of 49 weeks. The people who either saw the

film or read the book probably number in the tens of millions. The picture of the Air Force, and of the military establishment in general, as a nest of potential traitors is an unfair and misleading portrayal, but the novel is capably written and indeed absorbing in its cleverly plotted action. Together with Fail-Safe and Dr. Strangelove, it contributes to a national image of the Air Force which goes far beyond the more limited sociological and personal portraits of the novels discussed in earlier chapters. These three novels project the institutional Air Force on a wide political scale, and in their thematic concerns they insist upon questioning not only the judgment but often the loyalty of the professional officer corps to the values and procedures of constitutional democracy. The charge is a serious one, and the fact that these works are fictional detracts in no way from the powerful influence they exert on the popular conception of the military services.

As Professor Wayne C. Miller has observed in his book, An Armed America: Its Face in Fiction (1970), these novels are "interested in neither complexity of character nor complexity of themes or ideas," but "they titillate the reader with fast-moving narratives concerned with subjects of the utmost topical importance: the survival of American democracy and the survival of the world." (266) As literature, they are seriously deficient in projecting the enduring human conflicts and the fully realized characters which mark the lasting work of fiction, but as Miller notes,

> . . . coupled with the nonfiction dealing with the same problems, they contribute to a composite of concern about national and human survival unprecedented in the history of American culture. For the first time in the history of the United States, American novelists are suggesting that specific national policies are leading in the direction of national destruction. (266)

And in the forefront of that "leadership" marches the fictional image of the United States Air Force.

Chapter VI

THE AIR FORCE AT S.E.A.

The critical bias which characterized the portrait of the Air Force in the late 1950's and the first half of the 1960's has persisted even more strongly in nonfiction since the war in Southeast Asia has become the predominant national concern. But fiction thus far has not dealt extensively with the Air Force role in the war. Perhaps the same feeling of national frustration and disillusionment has pervaded our experience in Southeast Asia as that which characterized the Korean War, a period which also produced relatively few fictional works. Or perhaps the often bizarre realities of the Vietnam War have so dominated the news that would-be writers of fiction feel that to simply tell the truth is to relate actions and motives which are in every way stranger than fiction--and often far more incredible than even the wildest imagination could conceive and create in a novel. At any rate, fiction dealing with the Air Force in Southeast Asia has been sparse to date. Two relatively important authors have dealt with the national involvement there, but their works have little or nothing to say about Air Force matters. Graham Greene's The Quiet American (1955) and Morris West's The Ambassador (1965) are both political novels dealing with the early stages of American involvement in Vietnam and portraying what the authors believe to be the naivete, the sanguinity, and the often bland assurance which led the U. S. into increasingly serious mistakes in its dealings with the various forces at work in Indo-China.

West's novel, in particular, deals with the early stages of the massive military build-up in Vietnam, and it is interesting to note the way the novel's protagonist, Ambassador Amberly, views the chief American military advisor and his staff:

> Each night after mess I sat with General Tolliver and local commanders and reviewed with them the events and impressions of the day. It was a chastening experience to hear the talk of these men--veterans all--and to feel their sympathy and understanding for the folk whom they had come to serve. They were not cynics--though God knows they had reason to be! They had complaints: that military operations were hampered by political pressures; that President Cung [based overtly on President Diem] disliked casualty lists and was unwilling to mount strong and persistent attacking operations; that night operations were discouraged and that provincial governors were reluctant to collaborate with military commanders. But to the common folk they were warm and welcome, and they spent themselves in efforts far beyond the military contract. (158)

This is one of the few approving statements in responsible fiction regarding the military men in Vietnam not written by a writer whose obvious aim is to be a military apologist. West goes on to characterize Tolliver as a warm friend to the ambassador:

> He had his own private resentment: that he had been forced too many times to make military prophecies to satisfy the Pentagon and visiting Senators. In his view all such prophecy was meaningless. So long as we were prepared to pump in men and equipment, so long as we had air power and the Seventh Fleet, we could maintain a military operation in South Vietnam for a long time. But there was no end in sight, no major decisive action to be mounted; and certainly there was no hope of victory. (159)

This passage was written between October, 1963, and October, 1964; it is a surprisingly prophetic analysis--and it portrays General Tolliver and the military advisors in Vietnam in a most favorable light. The novel goes on to show the author's view of the mistaken acquiescence

by the U. S. in the violent coup which resulted in the deposition and murder of President Diem. It ends with the Ambassador's retirement to Japan. He rejects the violent activism of the West and his personal involvement with the U. S. actions in Vietnam. He repents of his role there and comes to realize that the only penance he can perform is to remain aware of the impossibility of penance--a feeling perhaps not unlike that shared by many Americans about our national role in Southeast Asia. The Ambassador is an engaging work of fiction which throws light onto the dark events during the time of Diem's ill-fated regime.

Among the Vietnam war novels that deal with the military action there, Richard Newhafer's No More Bugles in the Sky (1966) tells the story of a group of old World War II Navy pilots who are retreaded for action in Southeast Asia with the CIA. They form a clandestine fighter bomber unit and engage in raids over the north. Set in 1964 and 1965, the novel portrays the network of intrigue, restricted "rules of engagement," and general frustration which characterized the early stages of the military build-up in Vietnam. The protagonist, Dan Belden, is a 40-year-old ex-Navy pilot who promptly falls in love with the 20-year-old daughter of a French planter. This affair progresses, along with the intrigue and adventure, throughout the novel. The only U. S. Air Force characters of any significance are a couple of F-104 pilots at Danang, Lt. Col. Pat Murphy and Major Jack McKellar, who chafe under the rules forbidding them to fly over North Vietnam and engage the MIG fighters. When Belden and his motley crew stage a 2-plane mission out of Danang, Murphy and McKellar in violation of restrictions take their squadrons of F-100's and F-104's northward with Belden and a group of equally unauthorized Navy Crusaders for the showdown battle with Chinese

Colonel Lee's MIG forces over North Vietnam. An armada of 126 American planes assembles on Belden's wing for the flight. The author describes the occasion:

> One hundred and twenty-six Americans flew north. Thousands of miles away in their homeland, bearded college boys tore up their draft cards and waved banners calling for a victory for the enemy. But here on a Southeast Asian morning, one hundred and twenty-six Americans flew north and they split the sky asunder with the thunder of their coming, calling out a challenge that rushed through the wind ahead of them while old war cries sounded in their brains and they closed the distance that separated them from Colonel Lee and his MIGs. (290)

In the climatic aerial battle, Major McKellar is shot down by the Red Chinese ace, Col. Lee, who in turn is finally shot down by Dan Belden. Belden and Lt. Col. Murphy fly back to Danang with only 70 aircraft, but of the 305 MIG's engaged in the battle "less than seventy-five" survive. As they fly formation back to Danang, Dan Belden thinks:

> They'll be screaming in Washington and Paris and London, but screw them all. We got lucky this morning, lucky because Murphy and McKellar and a bunch of their guys decided there was something to being an American after all. Let those bastards in Washington chew on that for a while. This time we really opened the door. (301)

The novel thus ends on a note of proud, sentimental nostalgia for the good old days when wars were fought to be won; "you go in to win or you do not go in at all." (302) Belden realizes he has participated in the last great dogfight, marking the end of an era in fighter combat; there will be "no more bugles in the sky."

Melodramatic and improbable as the action is, the novel does attempt to show the complexities of the military situation in Vietnam in 1964-65. The focus is often on Vietnamese political and military

officers, both North and South, and many of the flying episodes are well written. The tone of the book blends adventure and intrigue with a constant undercurrent of indignation by the Americans at the political restrictions imposed on military operations. Richard Newhafer was for 15 years a Navy flier; he saw combat in World War II and Korea and flew as a member of the Navy's acrobatic team, the Blue Angels. His biases are readily apparent in the book, which is an overt plea for escalation and a military victory in Vietnam. The military are portrayed as unsung heroes whose rebellion against ordered restrictions is glorified as patriotic; they make policy by irrevocable acts. Although Air Force officers play a small role in the novel, they are depicted as unreservedly sympathetic with this point of view.

Far more propagandistic even than No More Bugles in the Sky is Carl Krueger's Wings of the Tiger (1966), which its author, an Air Force veteran, wrote from a screenplay. (Krueger also wrote the screenplay for Sabre Jet, a film of the Korean War.) Hardly a novel at all, Wings of the Tiger is episodic and almost completely plotless. The author in a lengthy introduction avers his

> . . . personal commitment as a patriotic American, a member of the human race and a ten-year veteran of the Air Force to tell this story with all the honesty and force I could muster.
>
> To tell the reasons why I believe President Johnson is so right.
>
> Why the futile, fulminating senators [presumably including Fulbright and Morse, who are mentioned by name in the novel itself] are wrong. (viii)

Krueger writes that he decided to expand his screenplay into a novel in order to introduce more fully his personal opinions regarding the Vietnam War:

> . . . to a novel I could add personal views of pure Americana--views I believe to be not only my own but also those of millions of Americans who desperately want to wave the flag; who are chauvinistic, patriotic Americans in the old-fashioned sense; who support our President as the Commander-in-Chief and let the dissidents fall where they may! (xii)

Little need be said about the full implications of his declaration. Suffice it to note that the book fully carries out its author's intent in tone, in style, and in theme. The episodes include a VC terrorist bombing of an Air Police vehicle in Saigon, killing a naive young U. S. airman; several conferences in which General Morgan, Commander of the 7th Air Force in Saigon, is variously characterized with unintended irony as a "menace," a "human puma," and a "truly dangerous man" whose "deep voice with the measured bite in it, filled the room," a man with a "restless mind full of napalm thoughts," "the human counterpart of the national bird that had long been a symbol of his country" (pp. 20, 87); a Forward Air Controller mission in which the Vietnamese pilot zooms and dives in panic as his American advisor fires a pistol at the Viet Cong through the window of the plane; and a press conference at which the only "liberal reporter" speaks with a "jackaled voice." (25) Gen. Morgan's thoughts and statements are the chief vehicle for expounding the rationale of U. S. involvement in Vietnam, and he is a total believer in the "domino" theory and the Communist conspiracy to take over the world by force and subversion. For him Vietnam becomes the crucial arena in which a victory is absolutely essential to prevent the outbreak of World War III:

> And below all this, on the map, were Borneo, Malaysia, Indonesia. And the northermost reaches of Australia and New Zealand. Too significant to be ignored.
> The masters in Peking coveted it all. Wanted to destroy it. Wanted to enslave it. If they succeeded in Vietnam, what

> was safe from them? What was next on their timetable? Australia? New Zealand? Or would it be India? (19)

The book evinces almost no doubts about the political and moral rightness of U. S. presence and actions in Vietnam. The one minor character who expresses the slightest qualms about bombing and strafing the Viet Cong is a young pilot, Dave Golden:

> To him it was a form of torture when he had to decide when killing was justified, when you were killing people who stood for evil rather than evil people. (98)

But Dave's roommate rebuts his tentative doubts and arguments:

> "I know who's right and who's wrong and it doesn't bother me in the slightest to kill off the wrong ones. These Viet Cong are bad. Real bad. My guess is I've knocked off quite a few. I've never had one bad dream over 'em." (99)

There is, however, one well-written and genuinely exciting episode near the end of the book. It depicts the attempts to rescue Major Charles Warren and his radar man Lieutenant Miller, who eject from their damaged F-4 jet fighter near Danang in Viet Cong territory. One rescue helicopter is shot down as it tries to gain altitude after hoisting Warren and Miller aboard. Another helicopter is shot down attempting to reach the three injured survivors. Finally, a Marine helicopter gunship, supported by fighter attacks on the surrounding Viet troops, manages to extricate the three men. The novel ends as Warren's girl friend, Gen. Morgan's secretary, visits him in the Danang Base Hospital together with the general who awards him the Air Force Cross. The ending is typical of many such movie fade-outs:

> . . . her voice trembled so that when she tried to, she could not say it out loud.
> "I knew you'd come back--Tiger."
> That was what she said.
> It was almost more than he could bear.
> For now he knew that if she could say that, it had to be for real.
> And life began-- (285)

Little more need be said about the book. If, as Krueger asserts in the introduction referring to his screenplay, "virtually everything in it was factual and based on some event which in reality happened," (x) then it is to be regretted that the events could not have been more skillfully shaped into a believable novel. As written, the book must be judged almost totally ineffective both as literature and as propaganda. The Air Force has its heroes, but its men are neither as unswervingly noble nor as unthinkingly simple as Wings of the Tiger portrays them.

A far better novel than either No More Bugles in the Sky or Wings of the Tiger is William C. Anderson's The Gooney Bird (1968). Anderson, an ex-command pilot with 22 years of military flying, makes an attempt to write a humorous treatment of the Air Force war in Vietnam. As his title indicates, the story focuses on an aircrew assembled and trained to fly the antiquated C-47 gunship into combat. This ancient aircraft, commonly known as the gooney bird, was equipped with side-firing Gatling guns and used as a ground support aircraft in Vietnam. Most of Anderson's combat scenes are set in the delta area around Binh Thuy, south of Saigon, during late 1964 and early 1965. His novel begins as the protagonist, Lt. Col. Larry Mahoney, age 47, receives his orders to start the training process which will lead him to become commander of a C-47 crew. The phases of the training at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida,

at England Air Force Base, Louisiana, and at the Jungle Survival School in the Philippines are depicted with a basic realism colored by the humorous overlay that Anderson casts over nearly all the events of the book. For instance, Mahoney's co-pilot is a young jet pilot lieutenant who has never flown propeller aircraft. Lt. Costello's honeymoon is interrupted by an Air Policeman bringing him orders to report for a flight to Eglin to begin training, and his frustrated and increasingly desperate attempts to consummate his marriage are the subject of recurring episodes during the course of the novel. At Eglin, Costello makes the mistake of referring to the C-47 as a "clunker" in the presence of one of the training officers, who upbraids him:

> "That lady you refer to as a clunker was born in the days of the wooden propellers. She is still flying as the jet age passes, and you can bet your skateboard she'll still be flying through the era of moon flight. That is not an old airplane sitting out there on that ramp, my boy: that is an institution. And in my presence she will always be referred to with the dignity she so richly deserves. Especially by bottle-assed, wet-behind-the-ears, blowtorch jockeys. Is that understood, Lieutenant?" (29)

Mahoney and his crew, including the Negro flight engineer, M/Sgt. Daniels, fly a C-47 from Travis Air Force Case, California, to Vietnam, stopping off at Hawaii, Midway, Wake Island, and the Philippines enroute. On one leg of the flight they solve a hydraulic leakage problem by using their stock of whiskey, supplemented with enough urine to fill the hydraulic tank so that they can lower the landing gear and flaps for landing. Similar zany incidents are scattered throughout the novel. Once at Binh Thuy and in combat, the crew are quickly exposed to the deadly serious aspects of the war as well as to the often bitter, always wry humor of the combat crews and forward air controllers. The missions

recounted include support attacks to help defend beleaguered army outposts in the jungle, attacks on Viet Cong riverboats, air drop resupply missions (one of which is a tale of dropping live cows to provide meat for ground troops), a defoliation mission, and psychological warfare leaflet drops and broadcasts. The novel covers either by action scene or by retrospective story a surprisingly wide range of air operations which actually were carried out in Vietnam. Some of the accounts are harrowing and evoke the fear and tensions of actual combat, but many are humorously told.

Lt. Col. Mahoney meets a young female war correspondent, Chris Easter, who flies with his crew on a mission, and they spend a delightful week together in Bangkok. This love affair of a girl in her 20's and a 47-year-old married man is handled with restraint and delicacy. The climactic episode of the book occurs when Mahoney and his crew engage in an all-out aerial assault, together with A-1 Skyraiders, F-5's, and F-4's, to protect a surrounded army fort. His C-47 is hit by flak and crash lands on the sand along a river bank. M/Sgt. Daniels is killed, and another crew member dies of his injuries. The remainder of the crew, including Chris Easter who has stowed away on board the doomed aircraft, fight off the attacking Viet Cong until they are rescued in the nick of time by a Navy patrol boat. Mahoney is shot in the buttock and after a farewell party in his hospital room, returns home to his wife.

The Gooney Bird is a bit cross-eyed as a novel. It attempts to keep one eye on the serious, often brutal details of war and death and the other on the light-hearted, antic acts and attitudes of most of its characters. Much good humor has been written about war, but the Vietnam

War has been such a shattering national experience that to treat it lightly is an exceedingly difficult task to accomplish successfully. The book makes telling criticisms of many aspects of the war: the jealous interservice rivalries over credit for body-counts; the absurd mixtures of the primitive and the complex in weapons and tactics ("Here we are in the twentieth century, with Mach-busting bombers, supersonic fighters, and The Bomb--and, believe it or not, last week a Special Forces sergeant staggered into his fort with an arrow in his back!") (p. 71); the ridiculously complex procedures for getting permission to bomb hostile targets; the crop-killing defoliation program ("In this day and age when half the world is hungry, do we have any license to go around killing crops?") (p. 124); the overkill inherent in modern attack aircraft ("We're using B-52's to blow up rice paddies and multimillion-dollar jet fighters to shoot up bicyclists,") (p.125); and the tremendous cost of the whole operation to the neglect of other national concerns ("When I think of what we could do to our own stateside poverty pockets and schools and slum areas with the billions of bucks we've poured into this quixotic quicksand, it fairly makes my hackles rise") (p. 66). These objections are still relevant, and it is to Anderson's credit that he raises them in a novel which, on balance, is weighted in favor of our presence in Vietnam. On one occasion, Larry Callaghan, an eccentric millionaire who stays in the Air Force as an officer because "--way down deep, in his own warped way--he's a patriotic slob," gives his opinion on the U. S. commitment:

> "Let's forget the fumbling that got us into this mess. We're committed now. We've got to finish it. Domino theory be damned, it's just good business to follow through on commitments. The only thing that gripes me

> is the screwed-up way Washington wants to fight the war. Let's quit pussyfooting around. Let's give an ultimatum to Hanoi. Tell them to get their Commies out of South Vietnam, or get their women/and children off the streets and prepare for a highnoon showdown. Then we'll go in with our bombers and button up this ludicrous taffy pull." (125-46)

Mahoney apparently agrees with Callaghan's view, but there is ambiguity about just where the author himself stands. The same Callaghan praises a sergeant who has been working closely with the Vietnamese:

> "There's a lad who's winning the battle. I firmly believe a couple [of] good Civic Action troops are more effective than a battalion of bloodthirsty Marines." (119)

Perhaps the author's final estimate is summed up in the thoughts of Col. Mahoney as he lies abed after his return home and mentally reviews his tour of duty in Vietnam:

> It was an uncomfortable, miserable quagmire with no beginning and no end. It has no defined battle lines nor bomb lines. It was like fighting hip-deep in Jell-O. The South Vietnamese had little determination or will to fight--national politics being determined far more often by gastronomic overtures than cerebral indoctrination. The political party most popular in an area was generally the one most generous with rice and fishheads. It was a corrupt, confusing, maddening, frustrating, miserable, hopeless conflagration that was bleeding America white with its insatiable appetite for troops and money. Never had a war, declared or undeclared, been more successful in creating internal strife among the great powers, and never had a war been less popular with combatants and noncombatants alike. In short, it was a sad-assed war. Maybe Callaghan's philosophy was right after all. Grab them by the balls, and their hearts and minds will follow. (253-54)

If the final sentences of this passage appear to be a simplistic reversal of the implications of all that comes before, it is yet indicative of the dilemma and the sometimes resigned, sometimes desperate

grasping for solutions that has characterized the national reaction to the Vietnam experience. Anderson's novel, though not a fine piece of literature, reflects with surprising honesty the politics, the tactics, and the feelings of many military people about the war, and it does so with enough humor to make reading the novel an entertaining experience. The book may offer a perspective to counteract the urgent seriousness of nearly every other treatment of Vietnam, fiction or nonfiction. War has spawned humor as well as death, suffering, and bitterness; Anderson's thus far unique contribution is his attempt to write his novel in that tradition.

Although much of its action takes place in and near U. S. Air Force bases in Thailand and its chief characters are Air Force fighter pilots, George Davis's Coming Home (1971) is essentially a novel of racial conflict concerning the relationships of three fighter pilot tent-mates on an air base south of Bangkok among themselves, their women back home, and their women in Thailand. Two of the pilots, Ben and Childress, are black; one, Stacy, is white. As the novel opens Childress has only one mission left to complete his combat tour while Ben and Stacy still have much time remaining before they can go home. The three men have been tent-mates, and though they maintain a surface cordiality there has developed no real friendship among them. Childress, though eager to return to his native Baltimore, is chagrined that his Thai girlfriend Damg--his "whore" as he calls her--will immediately transfer her affections to Ben, his fellow black officer. He decides to hide some anti-American, pro-communist propaganda leaflets in her quarters and notify the OSI investigators so that Ben will be later suspected of associating with a Communist agent. This accomplished, he returns to Baltimore

where he seeks out Ben's wife Rose and has an affair with her. Later, he kills a white policeman who insults him on the street and is jailed on a murder charge.

Ben is a Harvard graduate who, like Childress, has a barely suppressed hatred for the white man and an increasing reluctance to fight what he sees as a white man's war against the dark races of Asia. He finds through Damg a feeling of sympathy and union with the Thai people. They go together to local villages and finally to Bangkok for Ben's rest and recreation leave. While there, Ben confirms an earlier decision to quit flying, and rather than face the inevitable consequences of that decision should he return to base, he decides to defect to Sweden.

Meanwhile Stacy, the rather prim and puritanical white tent-mate of the black officers, worries over Ben's decision not to fly, but agonizes even more over his own frustrated sexual need for his fiancée, Roxanne, with whom he had a virginal but emotionally intense relationship. Stacy has refused to take a Thai girl despite the almost universal practice among the squadron pilots; instead, he fantasizes about Roxanne and masturbates. His frustrations come to a climax when he learns that Roxanne has met Ben's wife Rose and through her has come to help Childress get out of jail on bond. Stacy, knowing Childress' character and attitude toward women, is certain that his former tentmate has succeeded in seducing Roxanne, and on his last mission he reveals his own repressed racial hatred:

> The world is full of Gooks and niggers and they'll tear down everything the white man has ever built, I say to myself, almost as if I am talking to Roxanne, not to get her to agree with me, but just so she has it for the record. I wouldn't touch her now with a ten-foot pole. (201)

At the novel's end, Stacy is shot down over Haiphong by a North Vietnamese missile, and it is revealed that Rose, Ben's wife, has entered into an affair with a fellow office worker. Presumably, Ben has made his way to Sweden and Roxanne has become the mistress of Childress, leaving the tangled relationships even more morally chaotic than they were at the beginning of the book.

Coming Home is a diffuse novel. Like Salter in The Arm of Flesh, Davis chooses to tell the story through the viewpoints of his characters. Of the fifty-two episodes in the novel, thirteen are focused through Stacy, twelve through Ben, four through Childress, and the remainder through Rose, Roxanne, and several other minor characters. Without exception, the black characters harbor resentment, distaste, and often hatred for whites. The whites, chiefly represented by Stacy and Roxanne, are fundamentally patronizing in their attitudes toward blacks, but are presented as often unconsciously envious of the emotional and sexual freedom which the blacks exhibit. Davis has followed a predictable and sociologically fashionable pattern in depicting black-white relationships as fundamentally antagonistic, characterized by barely repressed feelings of distrust and profound resentment on the part of the blacks and a blend of cultural superiority and emotive inferiority on the part of whites. Blacks see whites as cold-blooded, unfeeling exploiters of the dark races and are contemptuous of their emotional psychic poverty; whites see blacks as intellectual and social inferiors whose emotional spontaneity and sexual promiscuity are qualities which fascinate with the dark power of the puritanically prohibited. There is in the novel no real trust nor love nor friendship between the races and no promise of any. Each race is a prisoner of its own prejudices, and life is a

constant effort either to repress racial antagonisms or to find ways, and those in it are predictably divided into the white super-patriotic bigots and the resentful black disaffected. The epigraph of the novel, taken from Richard Wright's Native Son, sets the tone and enmuciates the theme:

> When men of wealth urge the use and show of force . . .
> then it is to protect a little spot of private security
> against the resentful millions from whom they have filched
> it .

In Coming Home, George Davis, himself a black fighter-pilot veteran of the war in Southeast Asia, has written a profoundly pessimistic book which questions not only the motives and actions of the U. S. involvement in the war but the possibility of any reconciliation whatever between the motives and attitudes of the white and black people of America. The title Coming Home implies that the white man's past mistakes are coming home to roost; unconsciously perhaps, it suggests even more strongly and ironically that there is in actuality no real home to come to, that the moral chaos of the war is simply one more reflection of the moral chaos implicit in the entire history of racial relationships in America.

Chapter VII

THE AIR FORCE ENDS AN ERA

Not directly concerned with the war in Southeast Asia but depicting a continuation of the national problems exacerbated by that war are two recent novels, both of which have achieved wide publicity and a large national readership. Both exploit the topicality and intense public concern with the issues they raise, and both portray a nation bitterly at odds with itself over the moral and social issues which confront it. Neither offers much real hope that these issues will find adequate or even peaceful solutions.

Allen Drury's massive The Throne of Saturn (1971) is a serious attempt to project the current political, social, and racial conflicts into the late 1970's as they impact upon the U. S. space exploration efforts. The book takes its title from a passage in The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam which Drury uses as an epigraph:

> Up from Earth's Center through the Seventh Gate
> I rose, and on the Throne of Saturn sate,
> And many knots unravel'd by the Road;
> But not the Knot of Human Death and Fate.

The book deals with the planning of the first manned expedition to Mars, an event prompted by intelligence data which show that the Russians plan an early attempt to send men to the planet. There is a tremendous furor in the liberal press and among many congressmen in opposition to spending the money necessary to give the crash program a reasonable chance of success in beating the Russians to Mars. All

the national television networks are against the program, and the President and NASA come under severe pressure to abandon it. When it becomes apparent that the pro-space forces will not yield to this pressure, the opposition redirects its effort toward subverting the operation by encouraging labor troubles at the various plants which manufacture the space hardware and by insisting that the 4-man astronaut crew include a black astroscientist and an older astronaut who has been bypassed by NASA's own crew selection committee. The novel ranges widely in setting: from the White House, the Congress, and NASA headquarters in Washington, D. C., to the Manned Space Center at Houston, the launch facility at Cape Kennedy, various NASA installations in California and Alabama, culminating in a climactic scene on the surface of the moon. Literally dozens of characters people the work--a range as wide as that in Leon Uris's massive novel Armageddon.

The fundamental conflict of the novel is between the pro-space forces, represented by the NASA establishment and especially the corps of astronauts, versus the anti-space forces led by the liberal press and television networks but concentrated chiefly in the editor of an ultra-liberal magazine View, bearing the unlikely name of Percy Mercy. But on the human level--and in novels this is finally the only level that really matters--the conflict revolves around the efforts of the protagonist, Air Force Colonel Connie Trasker, to organize and hold together a crew of four astronauts, two of whom have been substituted for two originally-selected members as a result of political pressures brought to bear on the President by the liberal, anti-space forces. An important element of these forces is a labor leader, Clete O'Donnell, an influential national figure who is actually a secret member of the

Communist Party dedicated to sabotaging the U. S. space program. But Connie Trasker's immediate problems are with his two new astronaut crew members and their supporters outside the NASA organization.

One of these, Navy Commander "Jazz" Weickert, had been passed over by the astronauts' own selection committee, chiefly because he had shown himself in the past to be a technically competent but personally offensive member of the corps. As one of the veteran astronauts, he considers himself to have been slighted and becomes increasingly and openly resentful, even to the point of demanding before the crew was selected that Colonel Trasker use his influence to get him appointed to the crew. When the committee passes him over, he takes his case to Percy Mercy and his liberal cohorts in an effort to get the decision changed. Weickert has no wish that they make a public scandal of his case; he simply wants what he believes to be his due. When such a scandal is raised, Weickert publicly repudiates their support--but that support has by then succeeded in forcing the President to overrule NASA and appoint him a member of the crew.

The other forced appointee, the Negro astroscientist Dr. J. V. Halleck, is a much more difficult problem for Colonel Trasker. Dr. Halleck is, like Weickert, thoroughly competent in his scientific field, but he is a sullen, resentful, white-hating man filled with barely repressed fury, who cannot bring himself to accept the close and mutually trusting personal relationships which are essential to a crew which must live, work, and share together the inevitable dangers and confinements of an extended mission in space.

The fourth member of Trasker's crew, Dr. Pete Balkis, is a close friend and admirer who shares Trasker's own concern for the need to promote harmony and unity within the crew.

The preparations and crew training are plagued from the beginning by the internal dissensions of the crew as well as by recurring external problems brought on by the national controversy over the whole idea of the mission.

Through it all Colonel Trasker, a native of Colorado and a graduate of the Air Force Academy, maintains his equilibrium, but he is hard-pressed to keep peace on his crew. Weickert and Halleck, even though both are on the crew because of pressure from the same political forces, become increasingly hostile to one another. The problems are complicated by Connie's sympathy and affection for Halleck's wife, Monetta, who unlike her husband bears no resentment or hatred of whites. Her increasingly futile attempts to understand and aid her husband result finally in the irreconcilable breakdown of their marriage. Weickert, on the other hand, cooperates fully with Trasker as second-in-command of the mission, and the two become increasingly close friends.

The mission itself is scheduled to take place in stages, the first being a practice moon landing to make sure the crew, their vehicles, and all their equipment are in readiness for the prolonged trip to and from Mars. An anti-space demonstration mars the take-off ceremony, but the crew is successfully launched on the first phase of the mission which will take them to the moon. Arriving in moon orbit they confirm a report that the Russians also have a manned vehicle in orbit around the moon. It develops that the Russians' mission is to sabotage the American spacecraft, and in a climactic encounter on the moon's surface the Russian spacemen manage to jam the U. S. spacecraft's power system and cut all communications with the Control Center in Houston. In a tense and dramatic confrontation on the moon, a Russian actually

assaults Pete Balkis and slashes his spacesuit; he dies from lack of oxygen. Trasker kills the Russian cosmonaut and manages to destroy the Russian electronic "black-box" which had caused the power interruption--apparently by electronic jamming. He rejoins the command module in moon orbit only to find that during his stay on the moon J. V. Halleck has gone berserk and has wounded Weickert, who in turn killed him and jettisoned his body in space. Only Trasker and the badly wounded Weickert remain alive. After ramming the Russian spacecraft which approaches to threaten them again, they begin a harrowing return flight back to earth, landing successfully several days later.

The President instructs Trasker to keep quiet about the Russian attempts to sabotage the mission, but at a Congressional hearing Trasker is pressured into revealing the true story, which is immediately branded as an incredible lie by the liberal press and congressmen. Trasker insists that a second Mars vehicle be armed to defend itself against possible attacks or attempts at sabotage, but the President refuses to approve. Trasker resigns, and the President appoints another astronaut to command the second mission. But the corps of astronauts vote overwhelmingly to offer their mass resignations from the space program unless Trasker is reinstated. Faced with this threat to completely disrupt the space program, the President relents and reappoints Trasker. The book ends as the second mission blasts off, this time directly for Mars, almost simultaneously with a similar Russian mission. The implication is that the efforts made earlier to negotiate with Russia a cooperative program in space have not only failed but have resulted in even more intense and dangerous competition between the two nations.

The Throne of Saturn contains many episodes not related to the astronauts, scenes dealing with such matters as manufacturing problems, technical problems, political maneuverings, subversion and sabotage attempts, and news conferences. Drury is successful in giving a panoramic view of the immensely complex forces which in one way or another affect the space exploration mission. But the human focus is concentrated chiefly on the astronauts themselves and on their personal and professional lives. The book gives a believable and interesting picture of the astronaut program: it reduces the public heroes in white spacesuits to individual, unique human beings whose public image as All-American boys is shown to be an overly simple and distorted reflection of their true selves. Drury overtly and often blatantly propagandizes in favor of the "establishment," the astronauts, and the pro-space forces. The opposing forces are often reduced to caricature: for example, in the names "Percy Mercy" for the journalist and "Frank Unctious" for a network TV news analyst. But Drury does give a comprehensive and thoroughly entertaining account of the space program. And in choosing for his protagonist an Air Force Academy graduate who is a first-rate professional officer and an admirable man, he projects a favorable view of the Air Force and of its contributions to the national space exploration program.

A different and much bleaker picture of the Air Force and of America is reflected in Elia Kazan's The Assassins (1971), which achieved a high position on the national best seller list for many weeks during the winter and the spring of 1972. It is a diffuse novel set chiefly in New Mexico at "Collins Air Force Base" and an unnamed city nearby. The novel tells the story of how Air Force Master Sergeant

Cesario Flores, frustrated and irate that his favority daughter, Juana, has left home to live with a group of drug-using "hippies," lures Juana's boyfriend, Vinnie Connors, into his quarters on the air base and shoots to death both him and a black friend who had driven with him to the base. Sergeant Flores has been an excellent aircraft maintenance supervisor, and both the base and the local community are strongly inclined to sympathize with him in his parental revenge on what they see to be the polluters of his daughter. Flores is pictured as a man tormented and frustrated beyond endurance who convinces himself that his act of murder is to vindicate not only his devotion to his daughter but a religious vow he makes to the Virgin Mary. His vengeance becomes for himself and for many of his supporters a sort of emotional, religious crusade against the forces of evil represented by the hippies.

Despite the sympathy of the Air Force and the community Colonel Dowd, the Base Commander, is reluctant to publicize that support too overtly. Unsure of just what official position to take in the case, Dowd calls headquarters in Omaha--presumably Collins AFB is a SAC base, but it is never identified as such--to discuss his dilemma:

> "We can't win on this one," he said. "If Master Sergeant Flores, with our help, gets off, we will be reinforcing the impression general in our society that the air force, the navy, and even the army are privileged. On the other hand, if the man is penalized--and remember this is clearly a case of murder in the first degree--we will be outraging the community. They are fed up with these kids--hippies, I mean. There is another consideration on this side, even more serious. Either way--and this is why I say we can't win--we are leaving the impression that our highly trained personnel have been highly trained to solve their problems by the use of a gun. We are, are we not, trying to create the impression that our services are made up of decent, law-abiding citizens, repeat citizens, civilians! You can see the problem is complex, correct?" (80)

This passage indicates that Col. Dowd sees the problem in terms of the military image, but there is in the passage a flavor of cynicism,

an implication that a service filled with "decent, law-abiding citizens" is only an "impression" the Air Force tries to create and not a substantial reality. This picture of the Air Force as a cynical, image-conscious institution is confirmed when "Omaha" replies that there must indeed be no "display of privilege." "You are there," they tell Col. Dowd, "to protect the United States Air Force, and the services in general. You must bear in mind that at this time we are on trial with the American public; we have to watch every move we make." (83) Dowd engages the most prestigious lawyer in the city to defend Flores, and this senior lawyer assigns his brightest young protege--actually his illegitimate son, we later learn--to handle the case together with Lt. Alan Kidd, a young base legal officer who is Col. Dowd's son-in-law. As the investigation progresses, Lt. Kidd becomes more and more attracted to young Michael Winter, a hippie friend of the slain Vinnie Conners who wants to see justice done to Sergeant Flores but is convinced--rightly it develops--that the legal machinery and the jury it agrees upon are "establishment" to the core and will exonerate the guilty sergeant.

There is much drug-dropping and bed-hopping in the novel both among the easy-going hippie colony and the middle class lawyers involved on both sides of the case. The climactic event occurs when one of the hippies decides to assassinate Sergeant Flores with a rifle as he emerges from the courtroom during the trial. Michael learns of the plan and in an attempt to save his friend from committing this rash act, tells Lt. Kidd who in turn warns the police. Instead of arresting the hippie, however, as Michael and Lt. Kidd had expected, they set a trap and shoot him dead as he attempts to execute his planned assassi-

nation. Both Michael and Lt. Kidd--who by this time is thoroughly disillusioned with the "establishment" including his wife whom he plans to divorce--feel betrayed, but Kidd accepts the explanation of a police agent of why the trap was necessary. As Lt. Kidd tries to explain to Michael that the police really want to help him and that he should give himself up (he is suspected of collusion in the attempted assassination), Michael shoots him dead and disappears into Mexico. He is later heard from in Cuba and finally in Algiers, where he has become a violent revolutionary.

Meanwhile, the jury finds that Sergeant Flores was temporarily insane and exonerates him of the murder. Juana eventually leaves home again to join another hippie group, this time with no serious protest from her thoroughly disillusioned and embittered father, who has been forced to resign from the Air Force and works at a local aircraft maintenance job. At novel's end, no one wins. All is in a state of corruption, disorder, and moral chaos.

In The Assassins, Kazan goes out of his way to depict the Air Force in the blackest hues. At one point he introduces an Officers' Club scene with a short essay on the nature of fighter pilots--although not one such pilot appears as a character in the action itself:

> Uniformly young, dressed in one-piece zip-ups, it is not easy to tell the instructors fresh out of the air over Asia from the young men they train. Only when they wear their dress uniforms can the majors and baby colonels be detected. There is about them all an air of innocence marvelously wedded to a highly trained technological intelligence. Their specialized education has saved them, their faces reveal, from the unpleasant and demoralizing questions that more obstruse preoccupations would have raised. Physically there is about them all a confident lift of body and head that only the very young and the very favored enjoy.
>
> For them all pain has been eliminated from the art of war: Killing has become an abstract of scope smudges and

> calculus curves, of cross hairs and coordinates, of following orders phrased in the vocabulary of high arithmetic. Their innocence, it is plain to see, is not spoiled by the killing they've been trained to perform. Easygoing, they do their jobs with minds clean of complicating factors. They are nice guys, relieved of the burden of conscience.
>
> They are perfect mates for their F-4s.
>
> They are also automated, also programmed, the highest expression of a technological society.
>
> They know not what they do. (239)
>
> . . . . . .
>
> These men are pampered to the limits of the Christian tradition and military necessity. The part of the base where they stay resembles nothing so much as the campus of a country-club college devoted to postgraduate studies. The men don't live in barracks; they live in dorms. They have maid service. They are allowed beer in their rooms. Even the question of sexual release has been given official attention. Discreet but energetic efforts are made to bring girls within range. (239-40)

Not satisfied with this attack on the pilots, Kazan goes on to characterize Air Force wives with equally vitriolic fervor:

> Here [in the Officers' Club] are to be found the women in waiting, many of them wives of the pilots, dead, captured, missing. These wives are not there because they are waiting, but because they are not. It is odd, perhaps, that they should be looking for this kind of help from the very men who were or could have been their husbands' best buddies. (240)

These attacks are completely gratuitous. There is absolutely no dramatic action in the novel itself to justify them. No fighter pilot, no waiting wife is depicted at any point in the story. The author here is merely venting his spleen and flaunting his hatred for the Air Force, and he does so in the crudest, most unfairly journalistic way. Such passages, whether one agrees with them or not, have no place whatever in a creditable work of prose fiction. They reflect no credit on the author either as a novelist or as a journalist. Even propaganda, when

written as overtly as these passages, can convince no one who does not already share the prejudices of the writer.

Kazan does depict Col. Dowd in fairly sympathetic terms as a basically fair-minded if timid and image-conscious man. But his overall picture of Air Force people is extremely unfavorable, and the Air Force as an institution becomes a symbol of all that is wrong in the violent, amoral, corrupt, and decadent world which the novel creates. Appropriately enough the novel ends with a series of despairing vignettes the very last of which pictures the aircraft graveyard at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Arizona--which at no point figures as a setting in the novel's action. In this concluding Air Force portrait, Kazan states that such a location was picked to store the planes because they "deteriorate more slowly in desert air":

> So here they stand, the might of America, our answer to the challenge of history, our pride, our image, our identity, our names. (311)

Then he lists, by their military designations, the types of planes left to rot slowly in the storage area. The implication is obvious: these planes, representative of the violence, the cost, the futility epitomized by the U. S. Air Force, are the image of a bankrupt and deteriorating America. It is as bleak a picture of the Air Force and of the nation as has been attempted in recent years. As a novel, The Assassins does not merit the attention it has received, but the very fact that millions of Americans have read it suggests that its influence on the national consciousness may not be negligible. And in it the reader is forced to view the Air Force in a villainous and almost wholly destructive role.

Chapter VIII

A SUMMING UP

As the U. S. Air Force completes its 25th year as a separate service, the diminishing involvement in the war in Vietnam heralds the end of a trying phase of Air Force life and the start of a new and in many ways uncertain period. The fictional treatment of the Air Force during the formative quarter-century of its life has reflected with a great degree of comprehensiveness the problems of birth, growth, and sustenance which the Air Force and its people have faced during the years since World War II. From the recalled General Stonebreaker in Leon Uris's Armageddon, who couldn't really care whether his organization was "U. S. Air Force" or still "Army Air Corps," to the good-willed but uncertain Colonel Dowd of Kazan's The Assassins, whose chief concern was to handle a murder case so that it would do the least damage to the Air Force image, the fiction has reflected the essential quality of Air Force life as seen from the perspective of authors with a wide range of attitudes and biases. At the extremes are those like Carl Krueger, Richard Newhafer, Robert Scott, and Walter Lasly whose attitudes are wholly favorable to and whose works are overt apologies for the service, its people, and its policies. At the other extreme are writers like James Houston, Peter George, Francis Pollini, and Elia Kazan who see the Air Force as a corrupt and corrupting influence not only in its internal relations among its own people but on the politics and society of the country it represents. To the extent that each of these groups

of authors writes propagandistically, they resort to stereotypic situations and characters and to obviously oversimplified relationships and problems in depicting their fictional worlds. Their novels suffer thereby.

The heroic simplicities and simplistic hero-mongering of novels like Carl Krueger's Wings of the Tiger and Robert Scott's Look of the Eagle are not likely to convince their readers that the Air Force is really made up mainly of a collection of brave, dashing, single-minded tigers whose only purpose in life is to fight forever against overwhelming odds and to win glorious victories for an unappreciative nation--and for the girls who wait on the ground for their return. The characters in these books, to whom dissent is treason and politics an esoteric mystery that beclouds the essential simplicity of the issues, are so completely one-dimensional that they never come alive at all as real people in real situations. Rather they are embodiments of set positions, set ideas, like "Duty," "Fame," or "Courage" in some moralistic medieval allegory in which good and evil can never be mixed, as they most often are in life, but must be abstracted and labelled and simplified lest the point of the sermon be lost on a simple-minded audience. In works like Wings of the Tiger and Look of the Eagle, reality gets lost in apology, character gets lost in adventurous posturing, and fictional art gets lost in propaganda.

Similarly in such anti-Air Force books as James Houston's Between Battles and Peter George's Dr. Strangelove, the authors' extreme biases are so blatantly apparent that no fair-minded reader is likely to be convinced that the Air Force is actually composed of such morally corrupt, ethically blind, and mentally defective men as Houston's Major

Quigley and Colonel Mullins or George's General Jack D. Ripper and General Buck Turgidson. The satiric flavor of Dr. Strangelove does much to make palatable the stereotypes in that novel, however. The cast of characters becomes a cast of caricatures: Major "King" Kong, Colonel "Bat" Guano, Ambassador de Sadeski, Russian Premier Kissof, and Dr. Strangelove all are figures in a wildly improbably immorality play which lampoons not only the Air Force but also the highest U. S. and Russian civilian officials. The satire is heavy-handed, unsubtle, and often crude, but the book at least respects the general traditions and practices of its genre. If it is not convincing in its scathing portrayal of the Air Force, it at least provides enough humor to entertain all but the most serious-minded and humorless reader, even one whose own attitude happens to be pro-Air Force.

Houston's Between Battles, however, represents the most crude kind of anti-Air Force bias. Its protagonist is a whining, self-pitying, self-righteous young reserve officer who always looks for and finds the worst in every situation. The tone of the book is uncertain, at times reaching toward humor but more often settling for a petulant bitterness at everything and everyone in the military service. Apparently written to vent the author's spleen, as a novel it is a mediocre effort, as ineffective in its negative propagandizing as Krueger's Wings of the Tiger is in its frantic flag-waving. Both of these books are difficult to take seriously, for they both take themselves so seriously that the basis of good fiction, conflict, gets lost in advocacy and special pleading.

Much less extreme, and therefore much more effective in depicting the Air Force and its people in honest conflict are such works as Walter

Sheldon's Tour of Duty and Troubling of a Star, John Master's Fandango Rock, and James Salter's The Hunters and The Arm of Flesh. While none of these could fairly be characterized as pro-Air Force, they do in each case develop a conflict in which career officers in the Air Force are honestly represented. In Sheldon's Troubling of a Star, for instance, the protagonist, Captain Tindle, is genuinely torn between his humanitarian impulses and the military requirement to bomb and strafe the North Korean enemy. He has seen, on the ground as a forward air controller, the brutal effects of such attacks on innocent civilians, yet he realizes that his commanders and colleagues do not and probably cannot share his first-hand knowledge of and revulsion at the destruction they wreak. His refusal to shoot the helpless enemy pilot who has parachuted from his disabled plane confirms Tindle's humanity even as it provokes his commander to ground him. But the same mission also provokes Colonel Straker to retire without his general's star and results in an act of selfless if desperate heroism by the cowardly Major Ronsdale. The situations and conflicts show both the good and the evil of Air Force life in wartime.

The same can be said of novels like Salter's The Hunters and Master's Fandango Rock. In the former, Captain Cleve Saville is a self-aware man, who knows fully the one chief requirement of success as a combat jet pilot: victories over the enemy pilots. Yet he knows also the inner need for more complex, more comprehensive, more humane criteria of worth. He is genuinely torn between his commitment as a professional combat pilot and his growing sense of alienation from those values and impulses which originally led him to make such a professional commitment. He sees around him both hypocrisy and genuine honesty,

both conquering brashness and self-effacing humility, both blatant image-making and genuine nobility. And he is a human, humane, believable, indeed almost tragic participant in events which he can only partially influence and seldom if ever completely control. In this novel, the Air Force becomes an arena in which real conflicts between real people result, as they most often do in life, not in clear-cut victories but in illuminating and defining the human condition.

In Master's Fandango Rock, the Air Force and its people are genuinely concerned with meeting the challenges of an older and most unfamiliar Spanish culture into which they have been thrust. Some, like the well-intentioned but ineffectual public relations officer, Major Fremantle, do more harm than good with their misdirected efforts at fostering understanding and good will. But others, such as the staunch and principled Colonel Lindquist, command respect and finally prevail in maintaining at least a spirit of mutual tolerance with the Spanish community. The novel neither praises nor damns the Air Force as a whole; rather, it depicts fairly the cultural gap and the friction which are inevitable when foreign forces are stationed in a land where the government is politically friendly but where people are personally suspicious. Sheldon's Tour of Duty, Uris's Armageddon, West's The Ambassador, and, in a lighter vein, Arkell's The Miracle of Merriford and Singer's Wake Me When It's Over all deal with the same theme. Like Fandango Rock, they do so in a way which shows both the good and the ill of Air Force presence in foreign lands.

Among the more eccentric novels dealing with aspects of the Air Force not often explored in fiction are such works as Arkell's The Miracle of Merriford, Rosten's Captain Newman, M. D., Tarr's The Con-

version of Chaplain Cohen, and Ball's Rescue Mission. The first of these, written by an Englishman and first published in Great Britain, reveals in a whimsical fashion the way a provincial English village reacts to the disruption of its settled ways by the construction and manning of a big U. S. Air Force Base. Arkell is gently satiric at times as he needles the briskly aggressive spirit of the Americans, but his final tone is one of amazed admiration at the sheer good will and overpowering helpfulness of the resourceful American airmen. The novel only hints at the real conflicts which works like Tour of Duty, Fandango Rock, and Armageddon treat with serious concern.

Rosten's Captain Newman, M. D. is essentially comic in its vignettes of life in the psychiatric ward of an air base hospital. It contains serious episodes and makes an effective case for the work of the psychiatrist in the military service, but the final effect is mellowed by a tone of easy tolerance and good humor which is calculated to entertain more than to disturb the reader's sensibility. Similarly, Tarr's The Conversion of Chaplain Cohen submerges its serious episodes in a light-hearted geniality of tone which is successful in telling much about the relatively little known problems of the Air Force chaplaincy--and the even less-well-known Jewish component of the chaplaincy--while muting its criticisms of the service by a predictably happy if rather improbable ending to Chaplain Cohen's Air Force career. And Ball's Rescue Mission, dealing with the heroic exploits of two young Civil Air Patrol officers, shows both the unrecognized contributions of the CAP and the incredible eptness and efficiency of the regular Air Force in a story of suspenseful flying suited mainly to a youthful, adventure-loving audience.

More important in terms of their large popular audiences and therefore in their probable influence on the nation's image of the U. S. Air Force are four novels which have achieved best-seller status. Burdick and Wheeler's Fail-Safe and Knebel and Bailey's Seven Days in May, in addition to their commercial success as books, were also made into popular motion pictures. Drury's The Throne of Saturn and Kazan's The Assassins have also reached large audiences of readers. Together with the much earlier Armageddon and the more recent Dr. Strangelove, these four books have had a far wider reading audience than any other books discussed in this essay.

Fail-Safe and Seven Days in May both depict the U. S. Air Force in unflattering terms. Fail-Safe implies that an almost certain nuclear catastrophe will occur if the Air Force continues its practice of flying bomber missions armed with nuclear weapons and further implies that the complexity and unreliability of its electronic and mechanical control devices are likely to provoke that catastrophe despite the earnest and most conscientiously heroic efforts of Air Force men to prevent it. The book shows the Air Force as one decisive component of a collective military-industrial-political Frankenstein who has assembled a monstrous system which will turn upon its makers--and indeed upon the whole earth--and destroy them. Except for the obsessively demented Colonel Cascio, the Air Force officers in the book are depicted as men who too late come to see the destructive moral folly of their advocacy of and reliance on nuclear weapons. Even Brigadier General Black, the moral center of the book, though he questions the belligerant policies of Dr. Groteschele and of some of his fellow officers, is too late in becoming aware of impending catastrophe and is ineffectual in his efforts to influence

the policies of nuclear confrontation. And General Bogan, the SAC commander, is portrayed as a typical military professional whose views never transcend the narrow military ethic which exalts a restricted concept of duty and competition as its highest virtues. Although paranoid thinkers like Dr. Groteschele are the villains of Fail-Safe, the Air Force is shown collectively to be a willing, indeed an eager accomplice in acting as the agent of universal destruction.

Seven Days in May is even more sinister in its implications of the danger inherent in a powerful military establishment. General Scott not only has achieved the popular image but also the political and military support which makes him the willing leader of a projected coup d'etat against the President and constitutional government. As in Fail-Safe the villains are not all military men, and it is Colonel Casey of the Marine Corps who does most to discover and help to thwart the coup. But Seven Days in May does portray treasonous conduct by many high-ranking officers, including a majority of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The President's public pronouncements after the coup has been stopped tend to make the plot appear less heinous than the events of the novel show it to be, but there can be little doubt that the perceptive reader is expected to realize the true seriousness and the highly treasonous behavior of the military establishment, led in its plotting by an ambitious, self-serving Air Force general.

Allen Drury's The Throne of Saturn, concerning itself with the U. S. space exploration program and its problems, affects the Air Force only in the person of its protagonist, Colonel Connie Trasker. The book is pro-establishment in almost every detail, and Trasker is depicted as a humane, long-suffering, thoroughly competent astronaut whose prior

career as an Air Force officer has obviously fitted him well to meet the challenges of his post as chief of the astronauts. He is shown to be a man with faults, but essentially a man of conscience, courage, and principle upon whose decisions and integrity his fellow technicians and his fellow countrymen at large can depend with confidence. It is worth noting here that even though The Throne of Saturn is by literary criteria every bit as competent a novel as the earlier Fail-Safe and Seven Days in May, it has received neither the wide publicity nor achieved the wide readership of those two anti-establishment books. Nor has it equalled the audience of Elia Kazan's more recent The Assassins, also a profoundly pessimistic and anti-establishment book.

In The Assassins, the Air Force comes to symbolize the forces of corruption, waste, and moral decay that Kazan appears to believe are destroying America. It would be inaccurate simply to brand it an anti-Air Force book. It is anti-American, not in any sense which is susceptible to political interpretation but in the profoundest cosmic sense that it shows American society in an advanced state of rot--social, political, moral--which appears irreversible. It pronounces a final judgment on a dying society, and the only monument befitting the incipient corpse is a graveyard of decaying aircraft which represents the failed nation in a single encompassing metaphor. The Air Force is again the symbolic agent through which a doomed nation manifests its advanced decay. Pollini's Glover had shown in microcosm the kinds of attitudes and deeds which in the individual (like Glover himself) could be excused or evaded or even furtively admired but which, unattended, spread like cancer throughout a nation's flesh and bone and sinew to sap its strength and reduce it to a helpless moral invalid, unfit and unable to survive.

The Assassins portrays on a larger scale the logical consequences of those ostensibly amoral individual attitudes and acts which take on terrifying moral and social consequences when they infect a whole nation's ethical body. The Assassins is written as a bitter requiem, not only for the Air Force but for the country. It is a bleak book.

Considering the vast outpouring of journalism, essays, non-fictional books, and analyses of all kinds on the Vietnam War, it is somewhat surprising that the only Air Force fiction to come out of it thus far has been Kreuger's Wings of the Tiger, minor characters in Newhafer's No More Bugles in the Sky, William C. Anderson's The Gooney Bird, and Charles Davis's Coming Home. The first two of these works merit little further attention. They are strongly, even violently, pro-establishment, pro-military, and, in the current meaning of the term, hawkish in the extreme. Both do depict some of the varied operational tasks the Air Force has performed in the protracted war, and both contain individual combat scenes which are the most effective episodes in each. But they are fundamentally and overtly propagandistic books which titillate and confirm the feelings of those who already agree with their basic assumptions about the war and the Air Force role in it.

Anderson's The Gooney Bird, though finally a strongly pro-Air Force book, can hardly be labelled a pro-Vietnam-war book. Anderson's characters, although often presented as sympathetic comic stereotypes, do question the wisdom of the policies and missions they are required to execute. Old Colonel Mahoney, the book's protagonist, retains a perspective not unlike that of many Air Force veterans of the war: he questions the real need to do what the Air Force asks him to do, but he

does it as efficiently, as humanely, and as quickly as he can, counting the days until the combat tour is over when he can return from an absurd, insane war with the somewhat wry feeling that he has done his duty, whatever it was all worth to himself or to his country. Again in The Gooney Bird, the Air Force is an agent of destruction, but this time a self-doubting, reluctant agent--a group of real heroes cast in an absurdly serious, comic opera of a war.

George Davis's Coming Home presents the air war over North Vietnam and the life of the fighter pilots on a base in Thailand as simply an extension of a wider, more pervasive racial conflict between the white and dark races. Ben, chief black character of the book, quits flying and defects to Sweden, and Stacy, the most prominent white character, is shot down over North Vietnam as he agonizes over the defection of his white fiancée to a black man back home. Mutual distrust, suspicion, jealousy, and barely repressed animosity characterize every interracial relationship, and the novel suggests no prospect now or in the future for any reconciliation of these deep-rooted conflicts. If in structure and technique Coming Home is similar to Salter's The Arm of Flesh, in theme and meaning it is much closer to Kazan's bitter portrait of American society in The Assassins. In both of these works, the Air Force is simply a microcosm of the much larger arena of violence, racial bitterness, and divisive conflict.

There has been little to note about the literary qualities of most of these Air Force novels. Many of them are competently written, but even the most competent and technically sophisticated must be denied a place among the best modern American fiction. With very few exceptions it is unlikely that any of them will be read for literary interest much

beyond the few years following their publication dates. As works of historical and sociological interest, they might collectively provide future generations with a composite picture of the first twenty-five years of the Air Force which has real value in recording, as novels can do so well, not just dates and places and specific events but the sweep and feel of the late 40's, the 50's and 60's, and the early 70's. If so, they will have earned their small place in the annals of American literature. But which, if any, may endure--or deserve to endure--as literature?

Prophecy is a most uncertain pursuit, and prophecy about contemporary literature is among the most uncertain of all. But on the basis of sheer literary merit, on the basis of success in creating believable, complex characters and in endowing them with the multi-dimensional qualities which make people believe in and care about them, on the basis of dealing with a subject and making a thematic statement on that subject which is worthy of serious attention beyond any mere topicality of interest--on all these bases James Ballard's The Long Way Through and James Salter's The Arm of Flesh stand out most conspicuously among all the Air Force novels written thus far.

Ballard's novel begins with its airman-protagonist, Spear Williams, in the stockade. In a series of retrospective scenes he narrates his own story of his boyhood in West Virginia, his enlistment in the Air Force, his betrayal by a senior noncommissioned officer he has come to trust, his abortive marriage, and his subsequent career as a trouble-maker. Ballard's creation of Spear Williams is a fine bit of characterization, and Spear's firm sense of honor and personal integrity form the bedrock of a character who, because of this firm foundation, leads a life of essential loneliness in a world where compromise and moral quibbling

are the rule rather than the exception. He concludes that the Air Force has jeopardized its quality and its own best interest by stressing security rather than the challenge of excellence in its recruiting programs and by rewarding conformity above aggressive originality in its day-to-day operations. It is an indictment well borne out by the novel's action. But Spear Williams never turns completely bitter, and his disillusion is constantly tempered with hope. The Long Way Through is a novel of initiation and maturation, one of the most venerable of the modes of prose fiction. It is a genuinely moving work of fiction, marred only by one improbable incident when its protagonist ironically refuses to tell the truth about the accidental wrecking of a government vehicle. But even this refusal we learn later is prompted by Williams's personal pride and his sense of affront at the apparent irrelevance of the Air Force legal proceedings. Ballard has created a hero and a novel that deserves a place close to James Jones's From Here to Eternity on the shelf of modern military fiction.

If The Long Way Through is held together almost wholly through the character and the singular narrative voice of its protagonist, James Salter's The Arm of Flesh is unified only by its theme and its tone of existential malaise. Its fifty-five episodes are narrated by more than a dozen different characters, a narrative technique used so successfully by Faulkner in As I Lay Dying. The moral center of the novel is young Lieutenant Robert Cassada, who alone among the many characters is never allowed to narrate his own story and is therefore known only as interpreted to the reader by the other characters. Cassada becomes the focal point on whom converge all the various points of view of the men and women who observe him in the tightly knit world of a U. S. jet fighter squadron in Germany during the late 1950's. The chief observer,

and the most frequently featured narrator, is the Squadron Operations Officer, Major Clyde Isbell, whose inclination toward empathy with Cassada is balanced by the reluctance to risk his official prestige in a friendship with the naive young outsider. Salter organizes the entire story in a series of episodes which are narrated retrospectively during the desperate attempt to guide Cassada and Isbell to a ground controlled approach (GCA) landing in near-zero visibility. It is a very slim plot skeleton upon which to build a novel, and at times the reader is prone to simply forget that this climactic action is supposedly progressing as the antecedent actions are narrated in retrospect. Faulkner, in As I Lay Dying, used a family's attempt to convey the corpse of the mother to her desired burial place as a much more substantial action on which to hinge his retrospective narrations; Salter might well have chosen a more extended present-action plot for his novel. But despite this flaw, the book is a technical experiment unique among Air Force novels. Its theme of the forced isolation of a young pilot looked upon by most of his colleagues as an intruder is skillfully and poignantly developed. At the end, after Cassada has died in his crashed plane during the abortive attempt to land, Captain Isbell finally realizes his own failure as a leader and as a human being. His realization of what has been lost in Cassada's life and death in the squadron comes too late for making amends, but the tragic awareness of failure and the pathos of Isbell's own emptiness are evoked with a strong and sure emotional impact. The Arm of Flesh, technically and thematically, is, even if not entirely satisfying, the most complex and demanding novel written about the U. S. Air Force during its first twenty-five years.

None of these novels can compete in literary merit alone with the best of the Air Corps novels set in the World War II era. Heller's

Catch-22, Haine's Command Decision, Hersey's The War Lover, and Cozzen's Guard of Honor are in almost every respect--theme, plot, characterization, narrative technique--superior to the other works discussed in this essay. But The Long Way Through and The Arm of Flesh deserve at least to be compared with the best of the World War II group, and both Ballard and Salter are much less experienced writers than the professionals who wrote of the earlier era. It is, of course, unlikely that many career officers or airmen in the U. S. Air Force will evolve as significant novelists, and it is equally unlikely that professional writers will experience at first hand the intimate involvement with the military service that most often is a precondition of writing really significant fiction about it. Looking forward, it is possible to hope that within the next decade the definitive novel of the long and frustrating Air Force experience at war in Southeast Asia will be written. That appears to be the greatest single challenge now confronting the would-be novelist of the Air Force. If the first twenty-five years have produced Air Force fiction with more topicality than endurance, more sociology than art, more breadth than depth, and more shallow posturing than honest probing, there is some consolation in the knowledge that such has been the case in the life of every institution. A quarter century is too short a span to do more than indicate trends and potentials; the simple fact that an average of more than a novel each year has been produced about the Air Force indicates that writers of many persuasions have found it a fertile fictional ground. So long as man continues to feel the urge to record in fiction his vision of life and to create and people a world of the imagination, the Air Force will continue to challenge the writer to discover its real or imagined shape in his art.

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